Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy: Empowering Approaches for Struggling Students

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the phenomenon of strategies college instructors enact that support the academic success of historically underrepresented students [HUS] (i.e., first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color) experiencing academic struggle. A critical-constructivist epistemology was employed (Jaekel, 2021; Levitt, 2021). The theoretical framework combined elements of critical pedagogy (e.g. Darder et al., 2017; Kincheloe, 2008), pedagogy of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005), radical love (e.g. Freire, 1970; hooks, 2018; Lane, 2018), critical care pedagogy (e.g. Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997), and a student-ready institutional framework (McNair et al., 2016). The research was guided by four questions: (1) How do HUS understand academic success and struggle? (2) How do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success? (3) How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS? (4) How do instructors enact academic support for HUS?

Data were collected in three phases. In phase one, a qualitative questionnaire was sent to 143 undergraduate students who identified as first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color and who had experienced academic struggle while enrolled at The Ohio State University. The questionnaire asked students to nominate instructors who they believed supported their academic success. This study was unique in that students could

nominate any instructor regardless of teaching role (i.e., tenure-track faculty, lecturers, graduate teaching assistants, or staff). In phase two, 14 students who completed the questionnaire accepted an invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews. In phase three, six instructors who were nominated by students agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews and to permit observation of their teaching.

Several rounds of qualitative coding strategies were used to analyze data (Saldaña, 2021). Individual participant narratives were incorporated to provide thick description of the case. Thematic analysis revealed student participants understood academic success and struggle in terms of Performance Measures, Growth Mindset, and Integrating Knowledge, while instructor participants understood academic success and struggle in terms of Productive Behaviors, Attitudes and Outlooks, and Tangible Outcomes. Additionally, students identified supportive instructors by using one or more of the following themes, which were described using in vivo codes: Creates More Motivation for Me, Puts the Joy into Learning, Didn't Make You Feel Dumb, Made Material Understandable, Not Here to Hurt Your Grades, Treats Us as More Than Just Students, and If I Ever Needed Anything.

Student and instructor data were synthesized to create a Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy, consisting of three key themes: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. Actions instructors can take to implement this pedagogy include the following: guide students to master the learning process while honoring student autonomy and capacity to create knowledge, integrate care for both teaching and learning to communicate to students that they matter, and

convey to students that they are capable of success through embodying a mindset that all students can learn.

While the literature informing the study design suggested identity would be a key factor in conceptualizing academic success and struggle, students and instructors did not emphasize it. Students may have either thought identity was not relevant or downplayed its importance to focus on getting the academic help they needed. While instructors were conscious of issues impacting HUS, they believed it was important to help all students regardless of background.

Implications for theory included adopting the model of Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy, centering identity and social justice when enacting caring teaching, and practicing both caring-about and caring-for (Noddings, 2003). Specific actions to implement this pedagogy were presented. Implications for practice included prioritizing teaching in the tenure process, creating instructor development programing, and realigning the mission and vision for Land-Grant universities. Suggestions for future research were also reviewed, such as further examining the intersection of student identity and academic struggle.

Dedication

For Doug, whose unbelievable patience and unconditional support made this 13-year journey possible.

For Dave Miller (1939-2019), my high school English composition teacher, who taught me how to write a research paper and who recognized my academic potential long before I did. "Trust thyself."

And in loving memory of my mother-in-law Judy Warfield (1955-2021).

Acknowledgments

The weekend of May 3-5, 2013 was a big weekend for my family. My mom graduated with her Associate's (at age 60!) on May 3 and my sister with her J.D. on May 4. The plan had always been for me to graduate with my Ph.D. on May 5. But I did not graduate – my progress stalled after my candidacy exams and finishing my degree felt impossible. I sat in the audience at my mom's graduation, believing I was a failure because I was so far away from reaching my goals. By the end of 2013, I had left graduate school and was working full-time as an academic advisor. I swore I would never go back and finish a Doctoral degree. But it seems I just needed to wait for the right circumstances to align for my success. Thanks to the encouragement, support, and kindness of many others, I tried again. I finally made it to the graduation party – I'm just stylishly late!

I frequently tell my students that no one gets through college alone. That is also 100% true about graduate school, especially when trying to finish your Doctorate while working full-time during a global pandemic. Bear with me – this is a lengthy acknowledgment section because I have so many folks to thank for standing by my side during the ups and downs of this journey. None more so than my husband, Doug. Truly, I couldn't have done it with you. Thanks for your patience and encouragement and for always making me laugh. Thanks for believing in me even when I didn't and for

lightening the mood when I was taking things too seriously. Thanks for your grace and flexibility when COVID hit, and I had to move both work and graduate school to our living room. Thanks for helping me get to bed all those times I fell asleep in the recliner while trying to read journal articles late into the night. Thanks for telling me you would only allow me to procrastinate if I committed to playing Skyrim – somehow that always motivated me to get back to work? Haha. And by the way, just get started? Nah, it's done. I love you.

I also want to thank my family for standing beside me during this long haul. I'll never forget how excited you were when I said I was trying this again! Mom, I think my inspiration for being an educator comes from you. Thank you for encouraging me to never stop learning and never stop reading. Thanks for all the pick-me-ups you've sent me over the years that have made me smile. Dad, I still don't have a graduate degree in Tying Knots in Ropes or anything else that is hands-on technical, but I'm grateful that you've always supported my work. Undoubtedly my curiosity comes from you, and I've always considered that one of my best virtues. You always said I'd be a professor and that's finally coming true! To my sister Christie, I've long been inspired by your drive and vision, as exemplified in that one big paper you wrote – you know, *State ex rel. Ohio History Connection v. The Moundbuilders Country Club Company and Park National Bank*. I couldn't find a way to cite it in the body of my dissertation (I tried!). I'm so proud of all you've accomplished and I couldn't be happier to say "I am Christie's sister." Travis, I'm so glad to have someone else in the family who frequently sees the

world through a cultural studies lens. I'm grateful for your cheery optimism and sense of humor, both of which helped keep me grounded.

Thank you to Big Guy, Kristine, Matt, and Braden for your support. Dr. Wizard finally made it! The last year has been incredibly tough for our family, and while I wish we did not have to go through the tragedy, I am thankful for the ways our relationships have grown stronger and for your belief in me.

I'm very fortunate to have had not just one, but two excellent advisors who guided my journey through ACEL. To Dr. Jera Niewoehner-Green, running into you at the 2019 holiday party shaped the entire trajectory of my Ph.D. You've been a great mentor to me, but more importantly, you've shown me so much care and empathy as a friend. I've felt seen because of you. I'm grateful to work alongside someone who shares my passions and interests and pushes me to trust myself and pursue my aspirations. To Dr. Scott Scheer, I'm glad you were assigned as my initial advisor. At our first few meetings, I was nervous to sit across the desk from you because this was my second try at a Ph.D. Some folks would look down on a student because of that, but you saw my potential for a fresh start. I'm thankful for the times you calmed me down, gave me hope, and led me to view things in a new light. Your care for my well-being inspired me to keep going when things got tough in this process. Jera and Scott, thanks to both of you for taking a genuine interest in my life both in and out of the classroom – for example, always asking how my guinea pigs Marty, Henry, and Kenny were doing. Thanks also for engaging with my nerdy interest in Land-Grant history. When interviewing students for

my study, many of the positive things they said resonated with me because I've had similar experiences with you as my advisors. You're the best!

To Dr. Kristen Mills, you're an inspiration to me because of how much you embody critical care pedagogy. When I started diving into the literature around this pedagogy, you immediately came to mind. I'm grateful to have been a recipient of your care, both when I had a class with you and throughout this dissertation process. Thanks for asking necessary questions that I might otherwise try to avoid – you know, "What's your data management strategy?" and "How are you taking care of yourself?" I'm so glad you've been part of my journey.

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Thank you to a few other folks in ACEL: to Dr. Shannon Washburn and Dr. Caryn Filson for your interest and guidance, both with graduate school and with the faculty job market; to Mary Kivel for your kindness and support; and to Dr. Susie Whittington for cheering me on in my professional work as much as with my graduate work in ACEL.

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I want to acknowledge the unsung heroes of our campus – our building custodial staff and our administrative staff. My mom always said, "Custodians and secretaries are the most important allies you can make on the job," and she was right. I have received some awesome encouragement from our housekeeping staff, especially Steve from the third floor and Rose from the first floor of SAS. When we were forced to work from home beginning in March 2020, talking to Steve was one of the things I missed the most. Also, I am grateful for all the times our office administrative staff have helped me,

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Thank you to my mentors who inspired me to make higher education my career and taught me the importance of caring about students: Nancy Bihl Rutkowski, Sandy Mencer, and Sue Pasters. This research project also got me thinking about instructors that impacted my own academic success in college. So, I send thanks to Dr. Michael Flamm for holding me accountable to high expectations while also understanding my needs as a first-generation student. You were the primary reason I stayed at OWU. I also send thanks to Professor Sally Waterhouse who literally taught me how to study when I hung around after class, in tears, after failing my first-ever college exam. Like the instructors

who were nominated for this research project, you created a judgment-free space for me to ask basic questions and be honest about the fact I didn't have a clue how to study because I didn't need to during high school. I've used some of your study tips throughout my entire educational career and passed them on to other students. Thank you for being patient and caring about my academic success.

Thank you to my students who have shown interest in my work. My dissertation topic was inspired by your testimonies about your college experiences. Thank you for trusting me with your stories. I continually endeavor to advocate for your success because you have so much to contribute to this world. I am inspired by your resilience and your capacity for care.

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college teaching philosophy (and my love of birds). In his 2011 acceptance speech for the Ohio Professor of the Year award, he said:

> The most exciting part of teaching is working one-on-one to help each student fulfill his or her special potential. Awakening a passion in a young person and helping each student fulfill a newly formulated dream is the essence of teaching.

This quote both summarizes what it was like to have him as a professor and informs how I teach. I will always be grateful for his influence, and for giving me educational opportunities I might not otherwise have experienced, like going to my first professional conference (Wilson Ornithological Society, Fort Myers, Florida, 2002).

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> She turned it all around, like her life is so different than it was when all that happened… if you make a decision and you're like "here's the big thing I'm going to do," and you go down that road for a while and you don't like it, you get to change your mind… you cannot make decisions for yourself and for your future based on what other people are going to think. You have to do what's good and right for you, and best for you, and you have to figure out your path, and you get to figure and refigure it a couple times. … basically, recalibrate and do whatever you want.

(Episode 174 "Rough Winds and High Waters," May 23, 2019, 1:16:02 through 1:19:20)

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Agricultural and Extension Education

Specialization: Leadership

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1. Introduction

Although any college student may struggle academically, historically

underrepresented students (Students of Color[1], low-income students, and first-generation

students) often face significant and consistent barriers. While this population is currently

at the forefront of attention at Predominantly White Institutions, including Land-Grant

universities, retention and graduation rates remain stagnant in response to institutional

initiatives (C. B. Anderson & Steele, 2016; Association of Public and Land-Grant

Universities, 2020b; Gabriel, 2018c; McNair et al., 2016; Student Experience Project,

2021). For example, at The Ohio State University, retention, persistence, and attainment

for these populations has been consistently lower over the last decade as compared to

students who are not in any of these populations (Office of Student Academic Success

Analysis and Reporting, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). Retention, persistence, and attainment are

several key metrics of student academic success, as are overall GPA, academic standing,

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[1] APA convention requires capitalization of racial/ethnic identity groups, such as White and Black. However, scholars within the field of diversity and social justice education have opposing views on capitalization. Some agree with Abes et al. (2019), who stated they "do not capitalize *white* when discussing racial categories and identities, which is consistent with the core tenets of critical frameworks and the associated commitments to social justice and emancipation" (p. xii). Other scholars like Mack and Palfrey (2020), believe "choosing to not capitalize White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers would implicitly affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm. Keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities" (n.p.). As a scholar I choose to capitalize the identity White to make Whiteness visible and to show Whiteness as a historically created racial identity.

and the development of specific academic, cognitive, persona, and social skills (Johnson, 2013; Kinzie, 2020; Renzulli, 2015). Institutions like Ohio State are making a commitment to identifying which historically underrepresented students (HUS) are facing academic challenges and implementing interventions to help them achieve academic success.

Deficit- and Asset-Based Approaches

Deficit-based views of students and student success are common at higher education institutions (Bensimon, 2007; Taylor et al., 2019). A deficit-based approach focuses on what students lack when they come to college. It explains differences in retention and graduation rates in terms of student deficits (McNair, 2016). It segments the student body into advantaged and disadvantaged populations and places the blame for the struggles of HUS on their backgrounds, including a lack of preparedness and capital (Gable, 2021). Deficit-based perspectives are often tied to classism, racism, and other acts of oppression that fundamentally disempower diverse students (Means & Pyne, 2017). Deficit-based rhetoric permeates research on student academic success.

Deficit-based views are frequently observed in practice at Land-Grant institutions (Allen, 2020). As a historical example, even in 1868, Land-Grant universities were blaming student attrition on "poor academic preparation, financial shortfalls, and health issues" (Behle, 2013, p. 86). This did not recognize the fact that students were expected to provide at least three hours of manual labor each day, which impacted their ability to commit time, energy, and focus to their studies. A contemporary example is the rhetoric around preparedness. Students who are struggling academically are often labelled as

"unprepared" (McNair et al., 2016). However, there has never been a time in history when every college student was prepared (McNair et al., 2016).

The challenges faced by HUS are often framed as the fault of the student (Harper, 2010; McNair et al., 2016; Motta & Bennett, 2018). Research and practical literature abounds with explanations of why struggling students do not succeed: they were not ready for college-level work, did not understand and follow university customs, and did not conform to the norms of the institution. Institutional administrators, instructors, and staff may openly refer to these students in deficit terms, particularly when speaking of retention rates or reasons students do not succeed. Yet many factors determine whether a student will struggle, only some of which are within the student's control. For example, food and housing insecurity are often beyond a students' control, but they directly impact academic performance (Ezarik, 2022b; Meza et al., 2019). This deficit-based perspective over-emphasizes students' agency while minimizing institutional responsibility (Bassett, 2020).

The opposite of a deficit-based approach is an asset-based approach, which recognizes the full range of knowledge, skills, experiences, and cultural wealth that diverse students bring to college (Bensimon, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Educators who adopt an asset-based approach believe all students can learn, and they actively seek to draw on students' strengths to promote their success in the classroom and beyond (McNair et al., 2016). The focus is placed on what students are doing right that is helping them persist, and what institutional agents can do to sustain them (Harper, 2010). These equity-minded educators focus on their responsibility for student success and seek ways they can

challenge the systemic barriers that impact students (Bensimon, 2007). Adopting an asset-based framework is part of becoming a student-ready institution (McNair et al., 2016), one that rises to the occasion of meeting student needs rather than assuming struggle is entirely the fault of the student. A student-ready institution also examines its definition of success and whether it privileges the majority student (White, middle- or upper-class) experience as the norm by which all other students are measured (McNair, 2016; McNair et al., 2016).

Instructors are primary institutional agents who directly impact student success (Bensimon, 2007; Gabriel, 2018b). Multiple research studies specifically highlight the importance of faculty interactions and support for HUS. For example, in a study by Means and Pyne (2017), first-generation students revealed that "university faculty members were one of the most important variables for their sense of belonging within the academic life of college … a supportive faculty member proved to be pivotal" (p. 917). Faculty support includes several dimensions such as availability, demonstrating a sense of care, adopting intentional pedagogical strategies, and actively valuing students' diverse experiences and knowledges (Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020).

Instructor support for this population can result in measurable student gains in retention, persistence, and attainment; academic, social, and emotional growth; sense of belonging; and perception of a positive campus climate (K. C. Booker et al., 2016; Jacobs et al., 2014; K. J. Mills, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). As such, instructors are in a critical position to intervene in a way that positively impacts student academic success. This study will explore how instructors understand academic struggle and enact support by

engaging with those instructors who students from historically underrepresented populations have specifically identified as supportive of their academic success.

Background and Setting

This study focused on instructors and students at the Columbus campus of The Ohio State University. Founded in 1870, Ohio State is an 1862 Land-Grant institution and is widely regarded as the flagship higher education institution in Ohio. To understand the context of this study, it is essential to cover pertinent background on the mission of Land-Grant institutions, as well as the enrollment, retention, and support of HUS at Ohio State.

Land-Grant Heritage

Land-Grant institutions are public colleges and universities that receive the benefits of one of the following pieces of federal legislation: the Morrill Acts of 1862 (7 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) or 1890 (7 U.S.C. 321 et seq.), the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (108 Stat. 4048), or the 2008 Farm Bill (7 U.S.C. 3103). Ohio State was born of the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided Ohio with land and land scrip for the establishment of an agricultural and mechanical college. Land-Grant institutions have a tripartite mission to create, promote, and support teaching, research, and service (Croft, 2019). Land-Grant institutions are charged with providing educational access to the broad citizenry within each state (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2012; Sorber, 2013). As such, Land-Grants are commonly viewed as open-enrollment institutions, actively enrolling students of all backgrounds who are representative of the state itself.

5

The Land-Grant narrative romanticizes the idea of public higher education that is accessible and affordable for the everyday citizen, to "achieve the equal opportunity our society promises" (Sternberg, 2014, p. viii). Indeed, the Ohio State strategic plan includes a focus on access and affordability to align the university with its Land-Grant mission (Ohio State University Office of the President, 2021). However, Land-Grant universities have not always provided the access that is in line with their mission (Behle, 2013), and Ohio State is no exception. For example, in theory a Land-Grant would have an open-enrollment policy and accept a wide variety of students who are qualified to do the work, including those who may need remediation or additional preparedness (Sternberg, 2014). But only the regional campuses of Ohio State have open-enrollment practices.

The Columbus campus began a competitive admissions process in autumn 2003. This decision was lauded as an effort to both "provide Ohio citizens with broad access" to stay true to the Land-Grant mission, while also "admit[ting] the students who are the most qualified and have the highest potential to earn their degree" (Ohio State News, 2002, n.p.). This description of the enrollment goals could be viewed as suggesting that these two populations are not the same. In fact, a more recent narrative points to this decision as a move to increase the university's standing in national rankings even if it came at the expense of access (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Concerns continue about the university's commitment to its Land-Grant mission and whether Columbus campus is enrolling students in alignment with those values (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). This background about access and admissions provides context for understanding assumptions about who enrolls on Columbus campus and what they may need to be successful.

Columbus Campus Undergraduate Student Population

According to the official enrollment report for autumn semester 2020, 46,984 undergraduates were enrolled at Columbus campus, including 8602 new first-year students (Office of Student Academic Success, 2020; Office of Student Academic Success Analysis and Reporting, 2020a). Of those new first-year Columbus campus students, 24.3% identified as Students of Color, 19.2% identified as first-generation students, and 16.4% received Pell Grants (indicative of low-income status) (Office of Student Academic Success, 2020). These record high enrollments of HUS supports the university's quest to enroll students who are both diverse and best-prepared (C. Booker, 2021). While strategic enrollment priorities for underrepresented populations are essential, once they enroll, the institution must help these students achieve success, retain, persist, and graduate (Franklin, 2016).

As previously mentioned, underrepresented students at Ohio State are retained at lower rates and graduate at lower rates when compared to students who do not fit any of these categories (Office of Student Academic Success Analysis and Reporting, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). As an illustration, the university-wide retention and graduation rates of new Students of Color were consistently lower than those of White non-Hispanic students from 2010-2019, in some cases by a difference of 24% or higher (Office of Student Academic Success Analysis and Reporting, 2020c). Increasing structural diversity in terms of student enrollment from different groups is often viewed as a solution to access and retention for historically underrepresented groups, but this alone is not sufficient. The

solution to gaps in access and retention lies not in the number of students, but rather in the ways in which the institution serves and benefits them (Iverson, 2005).

Land-Grant Initiatives

In an effort to increase retention and graduation rates for HUS, multiple targeted interventions have been implemented at Land-Grant universities. For example, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities sponsors projects to support student success initiatives in the areas of online teaching and learning, data sharing, and academic advising (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2020b; Student Experience Project, 2021; York et al., 2019). At Ohio State, there are academic enrichment programs (e.g. SpringForward, Buckeyes First, Fisher FIRST), summer bridge programs to support the transition to college (e.g. Young Scholars Program summer bridge), and individualized tutoring and academic coaching (e.g. Office of Diversity and Inclusion tutoring program).

In addition to these student-centered programs, individual instructors and staff across campus implement academic support strategies in their everyday practice. To assist with this, instructors and staff can access recurring professional development. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (2020a) offers a series of professional development workshops and presentations to engage instructors at any Land-Grant institution on issues like culturally responsive teaching and exploring diversity in leadership. At Ohio State, professional development is offered through the Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning, which offers an endorsement in Inclusive Teaching, as well as periodic offerings from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and

Ethnicity and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. However, in most cases instructors are not required to participate in such professional development, and even if they do, they may not be recognized or rewarded by their department for their time and effort. For tenure-track faculty, this leads to making a choice about where to invest their time and energy as they develop their tenure portfolios (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). For graduate teaching associates, lecturers, and staff, professional development opportunities may be hindered by time and funding availability. Expanding professional development opportunities to all instructors and incentivizing them is an issue across Land-Grant universities (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, n.d.b). Nevertheless, instructors continue to play an essential role in student success and it is important to support them in this endeavor.

Need for the Study

The number of HUS continue to grow at both two- and four-year institutions in the United States, due to both shifts in population demographics and intentional university recruitment and enrollment strategies (Akos et al., 2020). Universities are under pressure to retain and graduate this population and to develop related initiatives and interventions. Further, recent events including the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice movements have forced many institutions to reconsider the impact of their policies and pedagogies (see for example: Simmons, 2020; Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020). This study was timely as many institutions were gaining momentum towards recognizing and fulfilling the needs of HUS populations and identifying and addressing systemic barriers to their success.

This change process necessitates an assessment of how and why students struggle in college. Much of the literature in this area is written from a student life or student success perspective, rather than from an academic affairs perspective. Previous research has shown that students in this population often need extra support through an asset-based, holistic approach that includes their academic, personal, social, and financial well-being, typically requiring university agents to adopt new mindsets and practices (Blue Moon Consulting Group & Simpson Scarborough, 2020).

Instructor development programs help expand existing professional knowledge of issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Acquiring this knowledge is essential to student support, but what instructors do with the knowledge is even more important. Although research indicates instructors play an essential role in helping underrepresented students achieve outcomes, there is a gap in knowledge of actual practices that support student academic success, as relayed from both instructors and from students who feel supported and successful. This study attempted to fill that gap while aligning closely with the ideal of becoming a student-ready institution. A student-ready college or university focuses not on what students are missing (i.e. why they are "at risk"), but rather on what instructors, staff, and administrators can do to implement high-quality, inclusive learning (McNair, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Previous research has synthesized historically underrepresented students' views about instructors who make a difference for their academic success. Existing literature on student-instructor interaction frequently focuses on co-curricular experiences.

Additionally, in these studies the instructor is assumed to be a faculty member, but students might interact with instructors who represent a variety of roles, such as staff, graduate assistants, or lecturers. There is also an abundance of both empirical and applied literature on instructor development of professional knowledge and teaching strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., (González-Gil et al., 2013; Iseminger & McClure, 2020; Nunn, 2019; Ryan et al., 2020; Siliman, 2020; N. T. Watson et al., 2019) . Gabriel's (2018a) book is one example that highlights college teaching practices to help bridge the achievement gap for this specific population. However, there are few studies that report instructors' perceptions of the struggles of HUS and how and why they engage specific strategies for helping these students achieve academic success. For instructors to be able to implement effective interventions, we must first explore strategies currently being enacted to support the academic success of these students. This study bridged gaps in the student success literature and scholarship of teaching and learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory instrumental case study was to understand how instructors supported the academic success of HUS (first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color) who were struggling academically at The Ohio State University. I explored the specific actions of instructors (tenure-track faculty, lecturers, and graduate teaching assistants) both in and out of the classroom. To support my understanding of the central phenomenon, I examined how and why students in this population came to believe they were being supported and the perceived impact of this on their academic success. Support for academic success was generally defined as specific strategies

11

enacted in and out of the classroom that led to students feeling supported to attain academic success. Methods of inquiry included interviews, observations, and a qualitative questionnaire.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do historically underrepresented students (HUS) understand academic success and struggle?

2. How do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?

3. How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS?

4. How do instructors enact academic support for HUS?

The guiding theoretical framework for this study incorporated critical care pedagogy and a student-ready approach. Existing research in the area of HUS success has uncovered elements of these pedagogies in action (Acosta, 2019; Adams & Rose, 2014; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Burke & Larmar, 2020). Critical care pedagogy links practices of caring with the imperative for social justice (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Falk-Rafael, 2005; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Rolón-Dow, 2005). It is made up of elements of critical pedagogy, pedagogy of care, and radical love. Critical pedagogy specifically emphasizes strategies for teaching and empowering marginalized students, highlighting how power and hegemony have shaped students' experiences (Kincheloe, 2008). Pedagogy of care emphasizes the teacher-student relationship and the ways in which teachers can help students flourish by enacting care

for their well-being (Noddings, 2003). Since caring "may be thought of as the motivational foundation for justice" (Noddings, 2003, p. xvi), it complements critical pedagogy. Radical love is a pedagogy that troubles Noddings' (2003) concept of care by introducing the explicit goal of empowering historically excluded students (hooks, 2003, 2018; Lane, 2018).

Taking these pedagogical perspectives together with the concept of a student-ready institution (McNair et al., 2016), I applied a guiding framework that illuminated actions and perspectives relevant to the experiences of student populations who have historically encountered exclusion, discrimination, bias, and deficit views within higher education. The guiding framework shaped my study and informed my research questions and initial data analysis. However, I remained open to other themes and theories that emerged from my data.

Conceptual Framework

This was a qualitative, exploratory, instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Case studies are effective for answering how/why questions about a contemporary phenomenon that a researcher cannot control (Yin, 2018). As an instrumental case study, the case was used as a critical example of the phenomenon of interest: instructor support for students in this population. This qualitative study was inspired by a critical-constructivist paradigm (Levitt, 2021), which is appropriate for studying a group of students who embody one or more socially marginalized identities.

This study was unique in that began with a student-centered focus. Students who completed an academic success enrichment program at Ohio State were asked to

nominate faculty who they believed supported their academic success. I interviewed

students who nominated specific instructors to gain further insight into why they

nominated the instructor and their perceptions of how the instructor provided academic

support. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with nominated instructors and

observed their classes to learn about their experiences working with students in this

population. I then triangulated the collected data to look for recurring themes and develop

a thick description of the case (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Definition of Terms

Specific terminology was referenced throughout the study. This list of definitions

provides an explanation of key terms. These definitions illustrate the conceptual

boundaries I maintained for the purposes of consistency throughout this study and in

conjunction with previous literature. These terms are further explored in my literature

review.

Academic struggle: Student academic struggle refers to a student experiencing one or

more of the following: cumulative GPA below 2.0; multiple failed, repeated, and/or

withdrawn courses; placed on university academic probation or departmental major

probation; repeatedly earning low scores on assignments or tests; habitually submitting

late assignments; failing to grasp course content or not meeting the course learning

outcomes; unable to demonstrate self-regulated learning.

Academic success: *S*tudent academic success refers to a student experiencing one or

more of the following: retained beyond the first year; persisting at the same institution;

achieving the degree within a four-to-six year timeframe; completing all attempted

courses in a given semester; developing specific academic skills; acquiring a general education; attaining academic goals; selecting an appropriate major; clarifying career aspirations; completing an academic enrichment opportunity (such an internship or Honors project).

First-generation student: A student for whom neither parent holds a baccalaureate degree.

Historically underrepresented student: A student who identifies as one or more of the following: first-generation student, low-income student, and Student of Color.

Instructor: An instructor is any classroom educator who teaches undergraduates, including tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, lecturers, staff, and teaching assistants.

Land-Grant university: A public institution of higher education that was created as a result of federal legislation, either the Morrill Act of 1862 (7 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) or the Morrill Act of 1890.

Low-income student: I define low-income student as a student whose family income level qualifies them to receive a federal Pell Grant.

Predominantly White Institution: A higher education institution at which the population of White students is more than 50% of the total student population.

Student of Color: A domestic student who does identifies with one or more of the following groups: African American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Delimitations of the Study

In this section, I describe the ways I have chosen to limit the boundaries of my study and my rationale. These boundaries include my definition of the student population that is the focus of my study, my theoretical framework, and my decision to use case study methodology. I also mention attending to researcher bias.

Research on HUS tends to focus on first-generation students, low-income students, and/or Students of Color. With the exception of Gabriel's (2018a) book, the majority of research I uncovered focused on one or two of these groups, rather than all three. For example, it is easy to find literature on supporting Black students in the classroom (Moore et al., 2018) or effective teaching strategies for first-generation students (Nunn, 2019). While it is important to recognize that each of these distinct groups could have different needs, in reality, most instructors interact with any combination of these students in their classroom – and they may not know it. Of the three categories, a student's race is perhaps the most likely to be recognizable to an instructor. Focusing on any combination of these three categories opens up the broadest range for instructor input and reflection.

A historically underrepresented student has at least one identity characteristic that is considered marginalized in the United States. As such, my theoretical framework focused on perspectives that acknowledged the oppression and disempowerment experienced by these groups (critical pedagogy). At the same time, existing research pointed to effective strategies for working with students who have experienced marginalization (pedagogy of care and critical care pedagogy), and my framework

16

accommodated these. Lastly, studies frequently adopt a deficit lens for analyzing student success, emphasizing that these students are at risk, lack cultural capital, or are underprepared. These viewpoints do not recognize the students' potential for growth and transformation, nor do they recognize the institutional responsibility for student outcomes. Therefore, my theoretical framework adopted an asset-based, equity-minded perspective ("student-ready") (Bensimon, 2007; Harper, 2010; McNair et al., 2016).

I chose case study methodology because of its potential to effectively describe both a phenomenon and its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I was interested in understanding how or why a contemporary phenomenon was taking place within a setting I could not control, which were essential characteristics of case study methodology (Yin, 2018). In particular, an instrumental case study allowed me to develop an understanding of academic support by focusing on the phenomenon of how teachers enacted it for this population (Stake, 1995). I generated findings that help us understand potential best practices and can be used to inform both research and classroom application in the future, not to produce generalizations (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). A case study design was well-suited to my research questions and the results may lead to future inquiry using other research designs.

I need to acknowledge my potential for unconscious and conscious bias. I was a full-time academic advisor and instructor at Ohio State who specifically worked with an academic enrichment program that enrolled many HUS. On the one hand, this was an asset to my study. Case study research is not intended to be value-free (Stake, 1995). My experience also informed and sustained my work and contributed to theoretical sensitivity

(Glaser, 2018). However, I remained careful not to force an answer or impose a preconceived perspective, but rather, allow my participants and data to speak for themselves. I managed this by triangulating data, generating thick description, clarifying my researcher bias, including negative or discrepant information, spending prolonged time in the field, reflecting with trusted peers, and memoing throughout the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; see also Table 8).

Summary

Through this study, I sought to expand the field's understanding of how to identify and support HUS who are struggling to achieve academic success. As previous research focused on general student success, co-curricular interaction between students and instructors, or applied literature on instructor development, this study filled a gap in understanding instructors' perceptions of this population and how and why they engage specific strategies for helping these students achieve academic success. The results of this study have the potential to inspire direct action by illuminating specific barriers and highlighting interventions that both students and instructors find effective. The results could inform instructor development strategies, curriculum design, and departmental decision-making.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter provides a summary of existing literature about historically underrepresented student (HUS) success. I review both empirical and theoretical work. I explain who makes up this population and the challenges they typically face. I define "Land-Grant institution" and locate this study in that context. Next, I explain my guiding framework for the study, Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy (SRCCP), which draws on the elements that inform critical care pedagogy (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Dadvanad & Cuervo, 2020; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2017; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; hooks, 2003, 2018; Kincheloe, 2008; Lane, 2018; Noddings, 2003, 2005) and a student-ready framework (McNair, et al., 2016). Lastly, I argue why this study is important and timely.

Understanding Historically Underrepresented Students

A population of students is termed "historically underrepresented" when the proportion of that group within the overall population of the university is smaller than the proportion of that group within the overall population of the United States (Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs, 2021; Wise et al., 2017). Although the term "historically underrepresented" is used in scholarship and practice as a synonym for Students of Color, the term applies to a broader group. Historically underrepresented status can tie to several social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, income status,

ability, or religious affiliation. Additionally, historically underrepresented is a term used interchangeably with marginalized, minoritized, or historically excluded. All three terms refer to the fact these groups have been shut out of higher education in the United States for centuries, as the system was intended to serve the dominant classes, specifically White, wealthy men (H. Giroux, 2017; Hytche, 1992; McLaren, 2017). I am choosing to use the term historically underrepresented as it is used at The Ohio State University (OSU), but I want to acknowledge that many of these groups are currently marginalized or excluded from the educational system, which still serves the interests of dominant classes, privileging some groups over others. Further, throughout this dissertation, I use language reflective of the studies themselves, even when these are not the most current terms.

I begin by reviewing foundational knowledge of the three student populations that are the focus of my study, including definitions, characteristics, strengths, and challenges. Next, I review of the concept of "access" and explain how this concept is enacted at Land-Grant institutions like Ohio State. I illustrate both specific and universal challenges that these students encounter. It is important to note that each specific group encounters unique challenges, but there are also commonalities across all groups. Furthermore, there are unique experiences within a group; not all students encounter the same challenges or encounter them the same way. Although I discuss challenges in this section, I am in no way implying that a student or group of students cannot overcome these challenges. My intention in this section is to illuminate some of the existing research on barriers that can make a student's journey through college more difficult.

First-Generation Students

There is no consistent definition for first-generation college students. Sharpe (2017) noted three definitions of first-generation students as defined by the U. S. Department of Education: "the legislative definition (no parent in the household has a bachelor's degree) and the two used for research ([parents have] no education after high school; no degree after high school)" (p. 16L). According to a study by Whitely et al. (2021), only 73% of surveyed institutions have a formal definition of first-generation. Of those, 56% define first-generation as "neither parent or [sic] guardian have a four-year college degree" (p. 3). Another definition includes students with parents who completed a four-year degree at an institution outside of the United States (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017). Bell and Santamaría (2018b) offer a more inclusive definition, describing first-generation students as "students whose parents and grandparents were historically excluded from societal participation and higher education for reasons associated with racial, ethnic, socio-economic and/or linguistic diversity" (p. 1). At Ohio State, a first-generation college student is formally defined as neither parent holding a baccalaureate degree (First Year Experience, 2021).

There is a prevailing tendency to view first-generation students as a homogenous group (Benson & Lee, 2020). However, they represent a wide range of personal and social identities, background experiences, abilities, and talents. Like all college students, first-generation students face some challenges during their college career. However, research indicates that some challenges are more common for this student population, as summarized in Table 1 (Bell & Santamaría, 2018a; Cataldi et al., 2018; Center for the

21

Study of Student Life, 2018, 2020; Educational Advisory Board, 2021; Gist-Mackey et al., 2018; Jehangir & Deenanath, 2018; RTI International, 2019).

Table 1. Potential Challenges of First-Generation Students as Described in Research Literature

First generation students are more likely to….	First generation students are less likely to….
Need more financial support and/or work full-time while in college	Graduate on time
Need diverse networks of support	Have a college mentor
Earn less upon graduation	Have a strong social support system
Be older, female, non-native English speaker, immigrant, indigenous, and/or Students of Color	Participate in university traditions, leadership development, study abroad, Greek life, and/or research
Have student loan debt and be personally responsible for repayment	Report satisfaction with their college experience
Require remedial coursework, earn a lower GPA, and/or withdraw from courses	Be enrolled full-time and persist at their institution after their first year
Depart higher education without a credential	Know they have FGEN status

Multiple research studies highlight the importance of instructor interactions and support for first-generation student success. Structured and unstructured interactions with instructors both in and out of the classroom are essential for this population (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). Students view faculty as trusted authority figures who can provide them

with information, resources, and encouragement (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). In a study by Means and Pyne (2017), first-generation students revealed that "university faculty members were one of the most important variables for their sense of belonging within the academic life of college … a supportive faculty member proved to be pivotal" (p. 917). Instructor support includes proactive outreach, availability, inviting students to office hours, demonstrating a sense of care, including first-generation perspectives in the curriculum, encouraging students to use their authentic voices in assignments, and actively valuing first-generation students' diverse experiences and knowledges (Bell & Santamaría, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020).

Instructors are in a critical position to foster first-generation student resiliency, sense of belonging, and overall well-being (Means & Pyne, 2017). However, when first-generation students experience bias, deficit-thinking, disinterest, and false assumptions on the part of instructors, they are less likely to reach out for help and are more likely to feel they do not belong (Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). When this occurs, students are less likely to be retained or persist (Solorzano et al., 2000; Tobolowsky et al., 2020).

In 1980, the term *first-generation student* began to be used "as a better way to identify disadvantaged students without referring to race or ethnicity" (Sharpe, 2017, p.16(L)). Some universities view first-generation status as a proxy for social class (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Both of these understandings are problematic. Not all first-generation students come from low-income backgrounds, nor do they all share a marginalized racial or ethnic identity. An intersectional approach is needed to understand

first-generation students, recognizing that a student's race, class, gender, and other identities impact their experiences along with their first-generation status. Some institutions use the definition "First-gen Plus" to emphasize that this characteristic intersects with other identities and can lead to multiple marginalization for some students (Whitely et al., 2021, p. 3).

Low-Income Students

Research and discussion on low-income students is less prevalent than for first-generation students or Students of Color. Many existing studies combine one or more of these identities or conflate first-generation status with low-income status. A low-income student may not be first-generation and could claim many dominant social identities. In higher education literature and practice, low-income status is typically defined by Pell grant eligibility. A Pell grant is a form of federal student gift aid awarded to students with exceptional financial need (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Surprisingly, there is no specific family income cutoff for Pell grant eligibility. Pell grants are awarded based on a student's expected family contribution (EFC), as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Several factors contribute to EFC calculation, including family income, assets, benefits, family size, and the number of family members enrolled in higher education in any given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Need-based aid like Pell grants also take the institutional cost of attendance into consideration when determining student eligibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). At Ohio State, a student's EFC and family income status are considered private, protected data. In practice, university staff and administrators use Pell grant eligibility to delineate

which students are most likely to be low-income. This practice of using Pell grant eligibility as proxy for low-income status can also be seen in the literature (Gabriel, 2018c; Nguyen & Herron, 2021).

Higher education institutions have prioritized access to colleges and universities for low-income students for more than two decades. However, despite improving admissions and enrollment, the differences in graduation rates remain the same; low-income students are still more likely to leave college without a degree when compared to their middle- and high-income counterparts (Blumenstyk, 2021). Two significant issues faced by low-income students are rising tuition costs (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, n.d.a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), coupled with jobs that do not pay livable wages (Herder, 2021). This combination makes virtually impossible for students to work their way through college (Carnevale & Smith, 2018), despite a prevailing myth that today's students should be able to pay for college on their own because many students in previous generations did. Low-income students are less likely to enroll in selective institutions because of the cost of tuition and fees, which can impact their long-term career prospects (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Cox, 2016). This phenomenon is known as undermatching (Muskens et al., 2019). Low-income students are also much less likely to have financial safety nets or parental support for college costs (Carnevale & Smith, 2018). The same report by Carnevale and Smith uncovered that low-income students are more likely to pay for school with credit cards than loans, which carries its own long-term financial ramifications.

Given the increasing costs associated with attending college, low-income students are more likely to work while taking classes. There is mixed research about the benefits of working while in college. Carnevale and Smith (2018) found that working less than 15 hours per week may have some benefits for students, but "on average, nearly half (47%) of students working 15 or more hours a week had a grade average of C or lower" (p. 7). As the number of hours a student works approaches full-time, their grades continue to decline (Carnevale & Smith, 2018).

Working while in college affects more than just grades. It also impacts a student's ability to engage and subsequently, their overall sense of belonging (Williams & Martin, 2021). Low-income students are not in a position to spend money to build relationships, such as going out to eat or engaging in campus party culture (Nguyen & Herron, 2021). They may feel out of place when they do not have the same clothing or technology as their peers. They might also not be able to partake in experiences that popular narrative paints as essential to college, such as spring break trips or study abroad opportunities (Nguyen & Herron, 2021; Williams & Martin, 2021). The inability to "fit in" or to participate in "typical" college experiences contributes to whether a student feels like they belong on campus or at college.

In terms of academics, inequitable conditions exist between low-income students and their middle- or high-income peers. Low-income students are likely to have fewer communications or interactions with their instructors and may experience bias in the classroom (Nguyen & Herron, 2021). Affordability of textbooks and school supplies is also an issue. Low-income students may feel pressured to spend money on new

technology or new textbooks, but they may not be able to afford these (Nguyen &

Herron, 2021). They may resort to renting or borrowing materials, which can take time to

secure, potentially putting them behind in class. They may forego purchasing

supplementary materials that can help them process the class material (Nguyen & Herron,

2021). This student population also finds it challenging to take on unpaid internship or

volunteer positions (Williams & Martin, 2021), which are often expected components of

a degree or for career aspirations.

Low-income students frequently make decisions based upon their immediate

issues in their lives, such as food or housing insecurity, which they are more likely than

their peers to experience (Cox, 2016; Dedman, 2019). The consequences of food

insecurity on student success have been well-documented; it impacts student physical and

emotional well-being, which in turn influences academic performance and success (Meza

et al., 2019). The ultimate danger of housing insecurity is that it can lead to students

becoming unhoused, which is a significant detrimental barrier for success. I use the term

"unhoused" because it is an asset-based alternative to "homeless" (Slayton, 2021).

At the same time, there are some protective factors for low-income students.

Recent research has revealed the importance of family support and expectations on the

academic success for this population (Roksa et al., 2021; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Low-

income students who are validated by their parents are more likely to feel committed to

college (Roksa et al., 2021). Family emotional support also impacts a student's well-

being and their willingness to engage with campus life (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Deficit-

oriented narratives frequently paint a picture of low-income families as disinterested in

their student's educational experiences. However, this is not the case for many students, who can draw on their family, community, and cultural wealth for emotional, psychological, and material support while in college (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) intentionally used the word "wealth" to focus on what communities possess, challenging the ways "capital" (i.e., Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital) has been used as a deficit-based lens for framing communities as lacking the culture needed to navigate educational systems. Specifically, Yosso (2005) connected Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to racist thinking as it uses the culture of wealthy White people as the standard of "capital." Yosso's (2005) work was seminal as it was one of the first studies to challenge the use of the term "cultural capital." However, much of the literature on HUS continues to use Bourdieu's framework without interrogating whose culture these students are "lacking" (recent examples include Havlik et al., 2020, and Tobolowsky et al., 2020).

Similarities exist between the challenges faced by low-income students and the challenges encountered by first-generation students and Students of Color. While there can be overlap in these populations, a nuanced view which acknowledged students' multiple identities helps us understand each student's unique experience. Low-income students are likely to encounter some very real institutional and systemic barriers to their success in college. However, staff, instructors, and administrators are in a position to enable these students to achieve their goals (Nguyen & Herron, 2021). The same is true for Students of Color, which I explain in the next section. While first-generation status

28

and family income levels do not directly correspond with race, students sometimes share more than one of these identities

Students of Color

Students of Color is an umbrella term encompassing students who identify with one or more of the following groups: African American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Although the enrollment of Students of Color is increasing nationally, they remain underrepresented within higher education (Franklin, 2016; Westbrook & Alston, 2007), including at Ohio State. Table 2 provides insight into the racial breakdown of undergraduate enrollment at Ohio State (Office of Student Academic Success Analysis and Reporting, 2020a). Columbus campus enrolled 2086 new first-year Students of Color in Autumn 2020, which was a record high.

Table 2. Undergraduate Enrollment at OSU by Race/Ethnicity as of the Autumn 2020 Census Date

Race/Ethnicity	Total Enrollment, All Campuses
African American/Black	4140 (7.7%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	36 (< 0.01%)
Asian	4006 (7.5%)
Hispanic	2692 (5.0%)
International	3228 (6.3%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	30 (< 0.01%)
Two or More Races	2288 (4.3%)
Unknown	1484 (2.8%)
White	35653 (66.6%)
Total	53557

As a result of this underrepresentation, race is often the most salient identity for Students of Color (D. M. Acosta, 2018). This could be especially so at a primarily White

Institutions (PWI). A PWI is an institution where the enrollment of White students is greater than 50% (D. M. Acosta, 2018; Franklin, 2016). Within PWI Land-Grant universities, the lower enrollment of Students of Color is partly attributable to the historical legacy of legal segregation and exclusion and the creation of separate institutions for Black students (Franklin, 2016). Students of Color may feel reluctant or apprehensive to enroll at a PWI due to the impression "that it's a direct reflection of rural America and the idea of racism that comes with it" (Franklin, 2016, p. 47).

Predominantly White Institutions frequently have lower retention rates for Students of Color compared to their White peers, which leads to a perception that institutions are not committed to Students of Color (Codallo et al., 2019). At Ohio State, the university-wide retention and graduation rates of new Students of Color were consistently lower than those of White non-Hispanic students from 2010-2019, in some cases by a difference of 24% or higher (Office of Student Academic Success Analysis and Reporting, 2020d). Increasing structural diversity is often viewed as a solution to access and retention for historically underrepresented groups, but this alone is not sufficient. Institutions may use increased enrollment numbers to indicate they have addressed and resolved issues around student marginalization and exclusion. Ahmed (2012) referred to this as institutional therapy culture, stating, "The institution, having 'confessed' to racism, might be understood as on the road to recovery" (p. 47). Ahmed (2012) specifically referred to racism, but the same applies for systemic oppression of other marginalized identities. Increasing enrollment numbers of diverse students becomes a way of marketing; just because an institution evokes diversity does not mean it will take

action or make a firm commitment to justice (Ahmed, 2012). The solution to gaps in access and retention for Students of Color lies not in the number of students, but rather in the ways in which the institution serves and benefits this population once they enroll (Iverson, 2005).

Racial identity shapes how Students of Color view themselves as students. Students' meaning making is impacted by the perspectives, paradigms, and climate of their academic department (Guthrie et al., 2013). The underrepresentation of Students of Color at a PWI creates a campus climate leading to negative impacts for these students. For example, in 2018, Black students at Ohio State reported statistically significant differences in belonging, acceptance, and experiences of discrimination and prejudice than their White counterparts (Center for the Study of Student Life, 2019). A student's sense of belonging in college can be thought of as the feeling that they matter, based on a connection to others, a perception of social support, and the experience of being cared about and valued by their peers, faculty, and the campus community (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn noted that understanding a student's social identities is essential to helping them find this sense of belonging.

Black and Latino/a/x students perceived that their classmates and faculty see them as intellectually inferior (Harris, 2017). As a result, they experienced stereotype threat, or the fear that they are personally fulfilling negative stereotypes about their race (Steele, 1997). This leads to students feeling emotionally drained and psychologically helpless (Solorzano et al., 2000), as well as to lower rates of retention, persistence, and attainment. Faculty members' implicit biases and assumptions shape their expectations of and

31

interactions with their Students of Color (Bensimon, 2007). In a study on the recruitment of Black students to colleges of agriculture, Franklin (2016) found that educators view Black students' culture as incompatible for the classroom, subsequently holding them to different standards than White students.

Students of Color experience these and other microaggressions regularly. Examples of microaggressions in academia include: unequal treatment, racial slurs, hostility, fear of safety, surveillance by university staff, and the campus not doing enough (or anything) to address racism and discrimination (K. J. Mills, 2020). These impact their overall wellness, which in turn inhibits their academic success and personal development (K. J. Mills, 2020). Table 3 summarizes the many challenges that Students of Color face at PWIs (Ahmed, 2012; Garcia et al., 2011; Lewis & Shah, 2019; Mills, 2020; Moore et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2012; Walton & Brady, 2021).

Table 3. Examples of Challenges Faced by Students of Color in Predominantly White Educational Settings

Personal Challenges	Educational Challenges	Other Acts of Racism
Lack of inclusive spaces	Colorblind and/or biased faculty, staff, peers	Abuse, bullying, harassment
Stereotype threat	Isolated in class	Racial microaggressions
Lack of culturally relevant resources	No representation in curriculum, faculty, and/or field of study	Unequal policing and surveillance
Racial battle fatigue	Tokenism in classrooms	Punished more regularly
	Low expectations from faculty	Discriminatory policies
	Unequal treatment in class	Pathological narratives

Personal development, sense of belonging, academic success, retention, persistence, and attainment are important outcomes for Students of Color. Protective factors that help these students find success include socialization programs such as peer mentoring, the creation of a physical and psychological counterspaces, and a campus culture of intentional support and care (Linley, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). Culturally relevant pedagogies, valuing of students' cultural capital, and inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum also help these students attain success (Bimper, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2013; T. B. Jones et al., 2016). Purposeful initiatives to support the success of Students of Color are especially critical at PWIs. Frequently, the learning environments at PWIs are constructed to separate White and non-White students through curriculum, ideology, and practice (Mahoney, 2016). Understanding this institutional context is essential when discussing the needs of HUS.

Historically Underrepresented Students at Land-Grant Institutions

The institutional context of this study is The Ohio State University, an 1862 Land-Grant institution. The 1862 Land-Grants are public universities created to serve the needs of the state through scholarship, teaching, and service (Croft, 2019). A popular narrative exists that Land-Grant institutions like Ohio State were created to serve the broader classes of society, specifically working-class and low-income students from agricultural areas (Gelber, 2013). Indeed, the Morrill Act of 1862 (7 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) stated these institutions were created to "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life."

33

A thorough review of Land-Grant history reveals these institutions do not have "a story of steady progress and improvement" that "benefit[s] everyone equally" (Peters, 2013, p. 342). The students who enrolled in Land-Grants in the first few decades came from higher class backgrounds (Behle, 2013; Gelber, 2013). In fact, the cost of attending college was a challenge for working class students even at the beginning of the Land-Grant system (Behle, 2013). Students from working class backgrounds would provide labor to help offset tuition costs. However, these universities still cost more than what most students' families would make in a year (Behle, 2013). Populists of the era argued that attendance at Land-Grants should be free in keeping with the vision of Senator Justin Smith Morrill, author of the First Morrill Act (Gelber, 2013). College cost remains a significant issue (Blue Moon Consulting Group & Simpson Scarborough, 2020). At Land-Grant institutions, decreased federal and state support has resulted in declines in student aid, which most significantly impacts students from lower-income families (C. B. Anderson & Steele, 2016). Sternberg (2014) called attention to the need for Land-Grants to increase access for low-income students to fulfill their original institutional mission.

These universities also struggled with accessible admissions standards from the inception of the Land-Grant system (Gelber, 2013). This includes admission of Students of Color. While the Morrill Acts did not explicitly exclude certain populations, the system that resulted ultimately excluded people of color from 1862 institutions and created and supported segregation through the establishment of 1890 institutions (Iverson, 2005). For decades, Students of Color were intentionally directed to enroll in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Even today, many Students of

Color may prefer the campus climate of HBCUs, which is one of the reasons why 1862 Land-Grants struggle to recruit these students (Franklin, 2016). A focus on the experiences of Students of Color became a priority only after the inception of the Civil Rights movement and the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision ending segregated schooling (Jacobs et al., 2014). However, 1862 Land-Grants are equally capable of establishing appropriately supportive environments for Students of Color.

Public universities experience increasing pressures to achieve high institutional rankings and maintain strong retention and graduation rates (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). This has contributed to debates over the decades about raising admissions standards and expectations of student preparedness. At Ohio State, these debates go back to the late 19th century, when the university vetoed increasing entrance exam requirements in response to public pressure to remain accessible (Gelber, 2013). However, then Ohio State President Edward Orton bemoaned the need to offer remedial courses "designed 'to bring up the work of backwoods districts'," stating that this "created mongrel institutions that clashed with the 'sacred' purpose of higher education" (Gelber, 2013, p. 171, citing Pollard, 1952). College preparedness is one factor that impacts student retention, which was also an issue from the very beginning of the Land-Grant system. Attrition was high and students often failed to make satisfactory academic progress (Behle, 2013). This continues to be a challenge for the modern Land-Grant (Page et al., 2014; Sternberg, 2014).

Access and equity are at the center of the Land-Grant mission to provide education to the citizens of each state. In order to maintain this mission, Land-Grants

must continually evolve to support the changing needs of the states (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Page et al., 2014). This includes paying close attention to who is enrolling and making sure the student demographics are representative of the state population (Thompson & Brighouse, 2021). It also calls for creating and delivering curricula and institutional supports that intentionally serve diverse students (Page et al., 2014). A recent survey of leaders at Land-Grant institutions identified diversity and inclusion as one of the top three challenges facing Land-Grants today (Blue Moon Consulting Group & Simpson Scarborough, 2020). The other top challenges are government funding and student mental health and well-being (Blue Moon Consulting Group & Simpson Scarborough, 2020). The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (2001) recognized that access and support for students from diverse backgrounds is still a challenge that must be met in order to fulfill the Land-Grant mission. In short, Land-Grants must make intentional efforts (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018).

Access and affordability initiatives are a priority at Ohio State. They are one of five pillars of the university's strategic plan. Ohio State aspires to "further our position as a leading public university offering an excellent, affordable education and promoting economic diversity" (Ohio State University Office of the President, 2021). According to the strategic plan, key goals include recruiting and enrolling low- and middle-income students, improving graduation rates for these populations, and improving affordability while reducing indebtedness (Ohio State University Office of the President, 2021). Arguably, Ohio State has made strides toward recruiting and enrolling a more diverse

study body that is better representative of the state population (Office of Student Academic Success, 2020).

However, a college student's journey does not stop at access. Once a student is admitted to an institution, they must retain, persist, and graduate. To help HUS find success at the university, university faculty, staff, and administrators need to be concerned with providing support (Hamman, 2018). However, what does success really mean? I now turn to a discussion of student success.

Understanding Student Success

Retention, persistence, and degree completion are the typical definitions of student success at the institutional level (Kinzie, 2020). Based on these understandings, student success is linked to integration, institutional fit, sense of belonging, economic factors, and individual beliefs and motivation (Kinzie, 2020; Tinto, 2017). While these definitions are straightforward and easily quantifiable, they miss out on the wider range of success measures, which can include critical thinking and writing skills; cognitive, personal, and social development; preparation for adulthood and citizenship; acquisition of general education and desired skills and competencies; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; and personal accomplishments (Braxton, 2008; Kinzie, 2020; Kuh et al., 2007). Further, Tinto (2017) found that students do not measure their success in terms of retention, but rather in terms of persistence and attainment; they are focused on completing their degree even if it means transferring or taking an alternative path. In this section I review the concept of academic success and the role of instructors in supporting it.

Defining Academic Success

Academic success includes completing all attempted courses, making timely degree progress and graduating within four to six years, acquiring a general education, and attaining academic goals, such as finding an appropriate major that matches one's interests and abilities, clarifying career aspirations, or completing academic enrichment (Akos & James, 2020; Johnson, 2013; Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019). Academic success can also be understood in contrast to academic struggle. Indicators of academic struggle can include overall GPA, number of dropped, failed, or withdrawn courses, major fit, or academic probation status (Johnson, 2013; Renzulli, 2015). Academic probation status is a meaningful measure of academic struggle because it portends the possibility of dismissal due to academic performance (Hensley et al., 2018).

From an instructional perspective, academic struggle could look like inability to grasp course material, not meeting course learning outcomes, low grades on assignments, or habitually submitting late work (Hensley et al., 2018). Educational psychology literature suggests academic struggle is connected to poor self-regulated learning, such as inability to manage time, lack of self-efficacy, or low motivation (Hensley et al., 2018; Tinto, 2017). However, the literature in this area tends to define academic success and struggle broadly instead of pinning down definitions.

I draw upon Schreiner (2012) to define academic success from an asset-based perspective. Schreiner used the term *academic thriving* to encapsulate many measures of success, including academic, psychological, and social well-being. Schreiner's research found the following characteristics of student academic success: engagement in the

learning process, making connections to the material, staying focused and attentive, and remaining energized by the learning process. Also, students who are academically thriving show academic determination, motivation to succeed, willingness to work toward goals, and self-regulated learning (Schreiner, 2012). Schreiner concluded that faculty play an essential role in student success, which I explore in the next section.

The Role of Instructors in Student Success

All employees of the university can play a part in implementing a student-ready paradigm, through teaching, mentoring, advising, and leadership (Bensimon, 2007). Faculty play a critical role in student success both in and out of classroom (Bensimon, 2007; Booker et al., 2016; Delima, 2019; Gabriel, 2018b; L. A. Schreiner et al., 2012)). A study that specifically focused on colleges of agriculture at Land-Grant universities found that positive faculty interactions significantly influenced student academic performance and persistence (Codallo et al., 2019). Instructor attitudes, perceptions, interactions, and pedagogical approaches directly impact the success of HUS (Benson & Lee, 2020; Jack & Irwin, 2018; Schreiner et al., 2012; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). Instructors contribute significantly to the college experience as the classroom is a key location for interaction, connection, and belonging (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017).

Structured and unstructured interactions with faculty both in and out of the classroom are essential for underrepresented students (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). Students view instructors as trusted authority figures who can provide them with information, resources, and encouragement (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). Instructor support includes proactive outreach, availability, inviting students to office hours, demonstrating

a sense of care, including diverse perspectives in curriculum, encouraging students to use their authentic voices in assignments, and actively valuing students' diverse experiences and knowledges (Bell & Santamaría, 2018; Harris, 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017; Schreiner et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2012; Tobolowsky et al., 2020).

Faculty are in a critical position to foster student resiliency, sense of belonging, and overall well-being (Means & Pyne, 2017). It is important for instructors to adopt a holistic, asset-based view of student success, such as that offered by Kinzie (2020), which recognized "every student can learn under the right conditions; therefore, the institution must organize its resources and create conditions for teaching and learning to optimize success. The talent development view of student success is about increasing the institution's commitment to developing students to their full potential" (p. 8). This definition shifts the responsibility for student success to the institution. This is a more inclusive view that allows room for diverse student talents, experiences, and identities, and places the onus on the institution to create a supportive environment. As Bensimon (2007) stated, student success is "a learning problem of practitioners and institutions" (p. 446). Faculty have a clear role in creating this successful environment.

The scholarship of teaching and learning provides practical strategies for instructors to help students achieve academic success in the classroom. However, there is little that explores or explains how instructors understand success and how they help students achieve it, particularly for this population. Additionally, much of the literature focuses on faculty specifically rather than intentionally including other instructors, such as teaching assistants, lecturers, or staff, despite the fact a wide range of educators impact

40

a student's college experience (Bensimon, 2007). This study began to fill gaps in these areas.

Historically underrepresented students encounter a range of systemic barriers and inequities that can hinder their success. This is particularly true at Predominantly White Land-Grant institutions, which have a historical legacy of inequities in access, retention, and attainment. However, when students' unique talents and cultural contributions are recognized, valued, and supported, they can truly thrive (Schreiner et al., 2012). All agents of the university impact student success (Bensimon, 2007), but instructors are in a particular position to support students because students spend so much time in the classroom (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017). Through this study I sought to explore and identify specific practices of instructors. To do this, I used a guiding framework, as explained in the next section.

Guiding Theoretical Framework

I used a guiding framework to shape my research questions and inform my initial data analysis. However, this framework was only a lens. As this was an exploratory study, I remained open to emerging themes and alternative explanations as I analyzed data. This framework consisted of elements from the following theoretical bases: critical pedagogy, pedagogy of care, and radical love, all of which are elements of critical care pedagogy (as illustrated in Figure 1). I combined all of this with a student-ready institutional approach. The elements of this framework were drawn directly from the literature regarding supporting historically underrepresented students' academic success. They aligned with my critical-constructivist epistemological view. They were also

41

inspired by my own experiences working directly with students in this population and hearing their stories about instructors who do (or do not) support their success. I now review each of the theoretical bases of this model and provide a graphic illustration of the model. I also explain how I intended to use it to fill in gaps in the student success literature (Ridder, 2017) (see Figures 2 and 3).
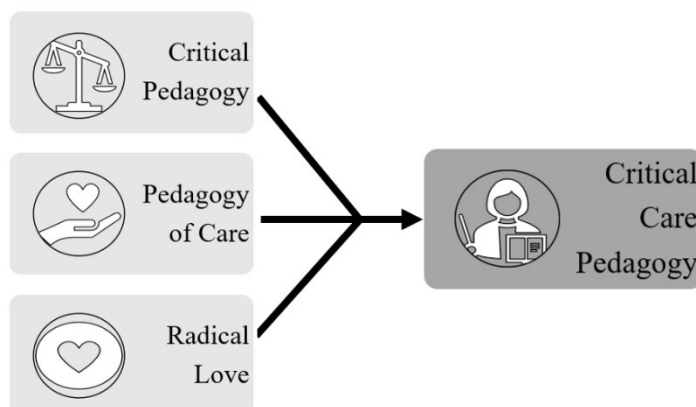
Figure 1. Elements of Critical Care Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy refers to a progressive movement to transform education and empower marginalized students. Critical pedagogy is based on critical educational theory, which is linked to the Frankfurt School of social theorists, including Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse (Darder et al., 2017). Their work emphasized joining theory and practice for the explicit goal of liberation and transformation of a socially unjust world (Darder et al., 2017). The Frankfurt School theorists were influenced by their historical context, specifically the rise of Nazi Germany and the development of Marxism in Russia (Darder

et al., 2017). Critical pedagogy also draws on the work of scholars like John Dewey, W.E.B. DuBois, Carter Woodson, and Paulo Freire. While there is no one unifying framework of critical theory, there are some common elements across theorists and perspectives, as shown in Table 4 (Darder et al., 2017; Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy calls for ongoing critique, both of society and of critical theory itself (H. Giroux, 2017).

Table 4. Common Themes in Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy

Philosophical Themes	Educational Themes
Adopting a dialectical view, that knowledge arises out of interaction	Exposing the hidden curriculum
Engaging in resistance against dominant power	Grounding an educational vision in justice and equity
Recognizing all knowledge has historical context and is constructed by human beings	Empowering students to change their social conditions
Alleviating human suffering	Enabling teachers to act as researchers
Challenging positivist views of education	Questioning class reproduction within schools
Exposing how dominant ideology and hegemony operate to make schools institutions of social control	Developing a school culture that empowers marginalized students

Critical pedagogy posits that all teachers and schools should be concerned with "social justice and human possibility" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 7). Educators need to rethink achievement and reconsider how much more students can achieve when they are

empowered. Educators also need to rethink how students and teachers relate to knowledge and to each other, and the ways in which power reinforces a vision of education that is not in the best interests of students (Kincheloe, 2008). Kincheloe described critical pedagogy as "dedicated to addressing and embodying these affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life … advocates of critical pedagogy are especially concerned with those groups and individuals who are suffering, whose lives are affected by the sting of discrimination and poverty" (p. 11). Indeed, a central theme across all critical pedagogy scholarship is the goal of alleviating human suffering, particularly for those who have been marginalized by society.

Critical pedagogues recognize that education is never neutral; it supports the dominant groups in power who seek to keep marginalized groups oppressed via schooling as a means of social control (H. Giroux, 2017; Kincheloe, 2008). A central tenet of critical theory is helping students recognize the political nature of education and the fact they are being intentionally oppressed (Freire, 1970; H. Giroux, 2017). Educators are responsible for helping students understand and affirm the value of their own histories and identities, as well as how society has prevented them from achieving their aspirations (H. Giroux, 2017). In critical pedagogy, educators must also help students interrogate internalized oppression. Conversely, because education is inherently political, teachers need to be committed to a progressive agenda that promotes justice and the deconstruction of exploitative relations (McLaren, 2017). This is not a pedagogy that tolerates indecisiveness, equivocation, or silence.

According to critical theory, knowledge is never neutral, but is always connected to specific historical contexts and power relations (McLaren, 2017). In schooling, this hegemonic view of knowledge is communicated through the hidden curriculum, which includes teaching styles, rules of conduct, classroom organization and procedures, and teacher expectations (McLaren, 2017). One of the goals of critical pedagogy is to help both students and educators recognize this connection and examine how and why knowledge gets constructed. (McLaren, 2017). Critical pedagogy stands at odds with positivist and structural-functionalist models of knowledge and schooling. It recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed and is created in dialogue. This dialogic view of education requires students and teachers to engage with each other in the learning process, rather than instructors depositing information into the (supposed) empty minds of students (Freire, 1970). It also requires educators to recognize and value the forms of knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom, even when these forms of knowledge are not valued by the educational system (Kincheloe, 2008).

Critical pedagogy is not a fixed, universal model; it is adaptable and transformable (Darder et al., 2017). Researchers continually evolve the model by focusing on specific tenets and/or applying it to specific populations, both at the macro- and micro-levels. In recent higher education research, critical pedagogy has been used to interrogate macro-level educational issues like neoliberalism, the conservative educational agenda, and the challenge of maintaining a hopeful perspective in troubling and uncertain times (H. A. Giroux, 2020; Greene, 2017; Macrine, 2020). At the micro-level, recent studies have explored the consequences that occur when instructors of

45

specific identities use critical pedagogy (e.g., Haynes et al., 2020). Critical pedagogy has also been used as a framework for preparing future educators (e.g., Kincheloe, 2017). For example, much has been written about the place of critical pedagogy in teacher prep for physical education (e.g. Kirk, 2020; Shelley & McCuaig, 2018; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). Studies have also explored the usefulness of critical pedagogy for creating socially just classroom spaces in higher education. This includes both in-person spaces, such as in Fritzsche's (2021) recent study of geography classrooms, and online spaces, such as studies by Mehta and Aguilera (2020) and Wiley (2020) of their own critical practices in digital pedagogy and distance learning.

Other recent studies have used a critical pedagogy perspective to analyze aspects of care in the classroom. Adams & Rose (2014) explicitly used Noddings' works on caring as a theoretical foundation. They studied positive experiences of marginalized students in online courses to draw conclusions about teacher behaviors that support the empowerment and success of these students. Dadvand and Cuervo (2020) sought to examine the impact of neoliberal approaches to school performativity and student success, and how these resulted in a co-opting of the concept of care. The researchers interviewed one teacher and one principal to explore how the concept of care could work against historically marginalized students. The one-size-fits all approach to care as enacted in this school does not actually meet the needs of those students.

As a final example, Lyman (2007) conducted a classroom action research study to examine her own teaching and whether it met the cultural needs of her students, who come from underrepresented backgrounds. Her students faced several challenges in their

lived experiences, such as drugs, gangs, poverty, and AIDS. Lyman (2007) drew several conclusions about how to effectively empower students and connect their learning to their lives, concluding "culturally relevant teaching works for all kids" (p. 191). I have highlighted these three studies because they connect critical pedagogy to the concept of care, an area where there is limited literature.

In criticizing the educational system of today, critical pedagogy also allows room to hope for what might be (H. Giroux, 2017). Students can learn to "critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (McLaren, 2017, p. 72). To accomplish this, teachers must role model an "impassioned spirit" to bring love, emotion, and hope for the future to the classroom (Kincheloe, 2008, p.4). They must create spaces that build students' confidence and encourage them to engage their own voices. Critical pedagogy is often linked to the concept of radical love, which I explore after reviewing pedagogy of care.

Pedagogy of Care

Nel Noddings is a leading scholar on pedagogy of care. Her work is referenced as a foundation for understanding moral education, the affective domain, and the enactment of care in the classroom. Two books summarize her philosophy of education. In her 2003 book, *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*, Noddings defined two concepts: an ethic of caring and the caring relationship. Noddings defined caring as an encounter that is made up of a reciprocal relationship between the "one-caring" and the

"cared-for" (p. xiii). The relationship does not need to be equal, but for it to truly be a caring relationship, the cared-for needs to respond in some positive way. Noddings (2003) pointed out that many students say schools and teachers do not care about them and their success. As the caring relationship requires a response from the cared-for, if students truly believe no one cares, then care does not exist, regardless of the actions of the teachers or the school.

To combat this, a caring teacher pays attention to their students' specific needs and interests and tries to provide for these within the classroom. The teacher acknowledges a student's feelings, emotions, goals, and motivations. They build trusting relationships with students and seek to understand students' views. Teacher care conveys a desire for the student to grow and become the best possible version of themselves. Throughout the text, Noddings (2003) sprinkles in suggestions for enacting care through relationship building and creating a curriculum that conveys the importance of moral education.

Noddings (2003) also called attention to the difference between caring-for and caring-about. The latter can be applied to a larger group, and it can be applied when caring-for is not possible. For example, teachers cannot care for everyone – they do not have the time, attention, or capacity, or they may find that they do not particularly like a student. But the teacher can still draw on a capacity to care and communicate this caring-about. The teacher can create an environment of support in which students still receive attention and affection. The caring-about can also serve as a foundation for justice, particularly when it is impossible to care-for. To create the best possible experience for

students, we should direct our energy to improving the situations that make caring difficult.

This desire to improve schools is evident in Noddings' (2005) book, *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education,* in which she applied her pedagogy of care to critique today's educational system. According to Noddings (2005), there is a difference between caring about whether students master specific subject content and caring for the student as a whole person. Even as we say we should care for students of all skills and abilities, our actions suggest otherwise (Noddings, 2005). We may say that all students are capable of learning, but we qualify that this is only true if they try. This overlooks the fact that many students are trying but are unable to grasp the material due to its disconnection from their lives or a lack of knowledge and skill. In this respect, Noddings (2005) critiqued liberal arts education as being disconnected from the knowledge that students truly need to know to be successful. Instead, education needs to teach care for self, intimate others, associates and distant others, nonhuman life, human-made environment of objects and instruments, and ideas.

Noddings (2005) referred to the concept of engrossment, which she defined as occurring when "the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the other… When I care, I really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey" (p. 16). This moves beyond empathy to investing complete attention in the student, making space for them and witnessing their story. Teachers must step into their students' shoes and see the world as their students see it, in order to move them forward. This requires creating a space for students to feel it is okay to make mistakes, be confused, and ask for help. By

demonstrating care, teachers can help their students become engrossed in the content of learning and find success.

Pedagogy of care has been more thoroughly studied in K-12 education than in higher education, but a few recent publications pertain to this topic. Gholami (2011) studied the epistemologies that inform teachers' practices at a school in Helsinki. The researcher tried to identify teachers' ways of thinking and interpreting their classroom situations, and their corresponding practices. Care was the primary epistemic value of these teachers, who enacted care for the whole student, including the students' personal and intellectual growth.

In a separate study, Anderson et al. (2020) explored how students made meaning of their classroom experiences and their interactions with caring teachers. They found elements of Noddings' approach present in the students' definitions of good teaching, including care for the discipline, genuine interest in students, and enthusiasm for teaching. Burke and Larmar (2020) investigated their own online teaching practices and drafted a specific online pedagogy with behaviors to be used to enact kindness and compassion in the online classroom. These behaviors included creating a safe learning environment, creating applied learning experiences, and opening up spaces for student interaction. Lastly, Larsen's (2015) dissertation investigated how a group of university students understood the concept of care as enacted by their professors. Larsen (2015) generated a list of five specific behaviors and eight influential factors that students associated with professors' care, further clarifying the concept of pedagogy of care in the higher education classroom. Examples of these behaviors include verbal expressions of

care, knowing student names, creating engaging lessons, and building relationships with students (Larsen, 2015).

Perhaps Noddings' (2005) most fundamental philosophy can be boiled down to this conclusion: "The living other is more important than any theory" (p. xix). Pedagogy of care is about recognizing and honoring students' humanity and conveying a desire to see them thrive. It requires educators to become engrossed in their students – really listening and seeing to understand their worldview. Through these practices, educators set up an environment where a student feels supported and valued, in which they are willing to try new things and commit to their learning because they feel understood and cared-for.

Troubling Care: Radical Love

One of the biggest critiques of Noddings' work is her colorblind (i.e., race-neutral) perspective. Her work can be read as suggesting a universal approach to and experience of care. Generally, Noddings, a White woman, does not address dynamics of race (or other social identities) and how these impact the practice and reception of care. Noddings (2005) noted that different identities may hold different interpretations of care and may prioritize the domains of care in different ways, but she did not elaborate. Her work called for teachers to become engrossed in students and to truly understand their worldview. However, she did not address the ways in which teacher and student identity and biases may influence the ability to understand each other's worldviews, or how identity impacts the communication of care.

Additionally, in her 2005 book, Noddings wrote about how she and her partner experienced a level of caring in their childhood schooling that does not exist today. This suggests a nostalgic or romanticized view of the past, which is problematic if it serves as the foundation for her philosophy. Her student experience of caring is colored by her own social identities and failing to acknowledge that influence on her work is troubling. Noddings' work has also been read as promoting a one-size-fits-all definition or enactment of care.

An alternative view of care that is in explicit alignment with the goal of empowering historically excluded students is the concept of radical love. Radical love is often associated with Freire (1970), who thought love was essential to the educational process. According to Freire, educators need to love their students as people, always in the service of empowerment and fighting oppression. This radical love manifests in a teacher's impassioned spirit and their desire to challenge and eliminate systems of oppression (Kincheloe, 2008). Radical love is care that is not neutral.

Black feminist scholar bell hooks (2003, 2018) wrote extensively about the concept of love in relation to truth-telling and justice. According to hooks (2018), love has an explicit space in teaching and learning, particularly in the service of challenging the dominant culture and hegemonic views impacting education. Lane (2018) referred to this as a politicized ethic of care. Lane's study of Black girls' empowerment programs illuminated pedagogical strategies that honored students' identities and facilitated positive school behavior through the enactment of culturally relevant (Afrocentric) teaching. The students in this study believed their teachers cared because the teachers

valued their lives in and out of the classroom, as well as the way their Black identity shaped their lives and experiences. This pedagogy considers both the practice of care and intentional empowerment of Students of Color. I argue that this is an example of critical care pedagogy, which I explore next.

Critical Care Pedagogy

I define critical care pedagogy as the intentional enactment of caring strategies for the purposes of educating and empowering HUS. Critical care pedagogy integrates elements of both critical pedagogy and pedagogy of care. Within the scant body of available literature, it is also called culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC) (Hambacher & Bondy, 2016). In particular, the critical care pedagogical approach is connected to the classroom work and experiences of Black women (M. M. Acosta, 2019; Lane, 2018).

Critical care pedagogy has roots in both K-12 and nursing education. In K-12 education, I see the roots of this pedagogy in the work of Black women scholar-educators Lisa Delpit (1988, 2006), Geneva Gay (2000, 2002) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995), who distinctly operated from a critical theory paradigm, but also incorporated theory of care. These authors emphasized the importance of creating empowering, culturally relevant classrooms where diverse students are valued and supported. All troubled the idea that knowledge is apolitical and that teachers should be neutral. Delpit (1988, 2006) addressed implicit and explicit rules of power that influence how we meet the needs of Black students. Gay (2000, 2002) argued for the use of culturally relevant curriculum in pursuit of building up students and drawing out their strengths. Ladson-

53

Billings (1994, 1995) envisioned a pedagogy that connects to students' lives, thereby engaging and enriching them in meaningful ways. Ladson-Billings (1995) also argued for holding high expectations and caring for the whole student. Both critical pedagogy and pedagogy of care are visible in these authors' approaches. As Gay (2002) stated, "Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (p. 109).

In nursing education, the theory was developed by Falk-Rafael (2005) and further developed and promoted by Chinn and Falk-Rafael (2018). Critical care pedagogy was developed in response to the models of medical education that have typically been used in the field of nursing. These existing approaches align with what Freire (1970) would term banking models of education. In a banking model, education is transactional; the educator deposits knowledge into the empty, waiting mind of the student. Falk-Rafael (2005) connected theories of caring with feminist theories and elements of social justice, to develop a pedagogy that enhances the dignity of learners. The authors saw the need to create and promote a theory that can inform epistemology, axiology, and practice as nurses work with populations that are marginalized, dehumanized, and alienated (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018). Chinn and Falk-Rafael did not prescribe specific teaching practices, but rather focused on how to create a caring environment in which learners could both study and experience this pedagogy for social justice. The connection between this work and my study is the focus on educating adults and the emphasis on working to support historically excluded populations.

Critical care pedagogy recognizes there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to care. Historically underrepresented students need different forms of care than students from

dominant cultural backgrounds (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Dadvand & Cuervo, 2020). Dadvand & Cuervo (2020) argued that the concept of care has been coopted by neoliberalism. Instead of focusing on an actual ethic of care that helps students, this neoliberal approach redefines care as meeting academic standards and specific performative goals (a view shared by Noddings, 2005). This form of caring fails HUS. For institutions and the actors within them to build strong relationships to support student success, the understanding of care needs to shift back to supporting the person.

Critical care pedagogy is a pedagogical disruption that requires educators "to confront taken-for-granted educational practices" and look for opportunities to "imagine new possibilities to teach and serve students in ways that go beyond mere content" (Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020, p. 353). This pedagogical framework presents educators with the tools to transform students through relationship-building, with an eye for understanding students' lived experiences and identifying and removing barriers to success (Wilson, 2016). It has potential to positively impact historically underrepresented college students, by connecting care for the whole student with social justice goals.

Student-Ready Institutional Approach

How can higher education institutions – particularly Land-Grant institutions like Ohio State – rise to the challenges of historically underrepresented student success? One approach is to bring about a paradigm shift. Instead of focusing on student readiness for college, universities should focus on their readiness to serve students. This is the concept of a "student-ready college" (McNair et al., 2016). A student-ready college or university focuses not on what students are missing, but rather on what faculty and administrators

can do to implement high-quality, inclusive learning (McNair et al., 2016). As McNair et al. stated (2016), student-ready institutions are intentionally designed across the board – in all areas, in all departments – to promote a student's successful progress through college.

The framework of a student-ready college is in keeping with the ultimate mission of Land-Grants. The 2001 Kellogg Commission report listed three broad ideals for Land-Grants:

> "(1) Our institutions must become genuine learning communities, supporting and inspiring faculty, staff, and learners of all kinds. (2) Our learning communities should be student centered, committed to excellence in teaching and to meeting the legitimate needs of learners, wherever they are, whatever they need, whenever they need it. (3) Our learning communities should emphasize the importance of a healthy learning environment that provides students, faculty, and staff with the facilities, support, and resources they need to make this vision a reality" (p. 1).

Student-centered inclusive excellence is at the heart of a student-ready college framework (McNair et al., 2016), which aligns directly with all three of these ideals.

The need for a student-ready framework has perhaps never been stronger than at our present moment. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted students. The 2020 report on APLU institutions produced by the Blue Moon Consulting Group and Simpson Scarborough recognized the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on historically excluded populations, particularly Students of Color. The report concluded that diversity,

equity, and inclusion challenges "will be amplified upon the return to campus… we can easily foresee dramatic reductions in the number of minority and first gen students who will be able to return to school next year" (p. 5). The report added that students will need extra support through a holistic approach that includes their academic, personal, social, and financial well-being. This likely requires faculty, staff, and administrators to adopt new mindsets and practices. In order to effectively support students, we must focus not just on best practices but on becoming the best practitioners who understand student barriers and systemic inequities (McNair, 2016; McNair et al., 2016). The student-ready college framework provides tools to tackle these challenges.

Identifying the Gap

There is a lack of literature that specifically focuses on supporting the academic success of historically underrepresented college students. Literature does exist in related areas. Previous research indicates caring from university agents, including instructors, makes a difference for overall student success in college, including the success of specific marginalized groups (Gabriel, 2018c; Kuh et al., 2004; Teven, 2007). Much of this literature focuses on the students' experiences or on co-curricular opportunities and relationships rather than classroom practices and activities. Research indicates that faculty caring can support students' academic engagement and motivation (Burke & Larmar, 2020; Gabriel, 2018c; Miller & Mills, 2019; Strachan, 2020). There are specific strategies faculty can use to enact caring both in and out of the classroom (Dowie-Chin & Schroeder, 2020; Gholami, 2011; Mehta & Aguilera, 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016), but these studies do not focus on academic success and very few focus on historically

underrepresented populations. The body of literature on caring focuses on chiefly K-12 education (McKamey, 2011, 2017; Noddings, 2003, 2005; Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016).

Some of the studies cited in this chapter point to this gap. There is a call for college-level educators to use critical pedagogy strategies to support this population. This includes intentionally understanding students' prior knowledge and background experiences and approaching teaching with equity-mindedness (Bensimon, 2007; Castillo-Montoya, 2019; Lane, 2018; Miller & Mills, 2019). It also includes focusing on power, oppression, and the political context of education and how these impact student development (Mahoney, 2016; McGregor, 2004).

The studies promoting critical care pedagogy largely focus on K-12 education (Gholami, 2011; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; Karusala et al., 2017; Moen et al., 2020; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; Roberts, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2005; W. Watson et al., 2016) or nursing (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Falk-Rafael, 2005). There are a few studies that integrate caring and critical pedagogy as a means of supporting historically marginalized groups in higher education (Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020), but again, the emphasis is not always on academic success. Critical care pedagogy holds potential as a theoretical guide for understanding college teachers' enactment of support. The student-ready framework helps situate this framework within higher education, and connects it to the goals of retention, persistence, and attainment.

Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy

I combined the above elements into my guiding theoretical framework model: Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy. Figure 2 illustrates some of the hallmark instructor behaviors within each theory in my framework. These sensitized my data collection and analysis. There is some overlap across theories. This leads to Figure 3, which illustrates how the theories came together to create a guiding framework.

Critical Pedagogy	Pedagogy of Care	Radical Love	Critical Care Pedagogy	Student-Ready Approach
Strives for equitable classroom practices	Engages in a reciprocal relationship	Loves students as people	Has high expectations for all students	Embraces the whole student
Works to address personal bias	Demonstrates empathy	Embraces student identities and recognizes their impact	Respects student autonomy	Recognizes student needs
Looks for ways to empower students	Demonstrates care for the act of teaching, the discipline, and the student	Keeps an impassioned spirit in service of underrepresented groups	Values students' unique backgrounds and contributions	Focuses on what the instructor and/or the institution can do
Develops inclusive and representative curriculum	Calls upon capacity to care	Takes a political stance on care	Affirms student identities and experiences	Commitment to personal and professional growth as an instructor

Instructor Behaviors

Figure 2. Connecting Theories with Instructor Behaviors
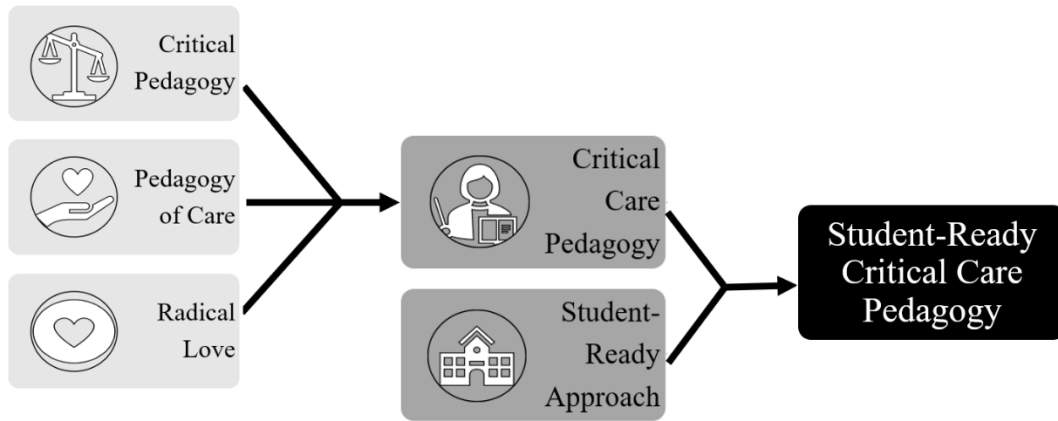
Figure 3. Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy

As previously discussed, this guiding framework informed the development of my research questions. My research questions probed for elements of this framework. At the same time, they were not too restrictive, to allow emerging themes. This approach to using a theoretical framework is what Ridder (2017) called a "gaps and holes" approach to a case study. Utilizing a gaps and holes research design for a case study allows the researcher to utilize tentative theory while also remaining open to new elements or relationships (Ridder, 2017). The researcher begins by looking for gaps and holes in existing literature and theory around the topic of interest. From this emerges a guiding theoretical framework that informs the research strategy and data collection.

It was impossible for me as the researcher to approach this study with a blank slate. While I intended to remain open to new themes and alternative explanations, my worldview informed all aspects of my study. This is where adopting a critical-constructivist epistemology is important. I see the world through a critical theory lens, and this is unlikely to change. However, my commitment to constructivism leads me to

believe that meaning is constructed through interaction, so I needed to stay open to how instructors and students were constructing meaning, even if the eventual result was that this guiding framework was not salient or appropriate. My researcher positionality, bias, and mitigation strategies are addressed in chapter three.

Summary

In this chapter I provided a summary of existing empirical and theoretical literature related to my research topic. Historically underrepresented students' academic success is an institutional priority at OSU (Ohio State University Office of the President, 2021). Their success has a direct positive impact on retention, persistence, and attainment rates (Kinzie, 2020). The academic success of this population is also directly related to the mission of Land-Grant universities to provide access to students who represent the population of the state, which challenges the historical legacy of exclusion (Peters, 2013; Sternberg, 2014; Thompson & Brighouse, 2021).

I reviewed the characteristics of historically underrepresented student groups including the challenges and barriers to their academic success in college (e.g., Bell & Santamaría, 2018; Blumenstyk, 2021; Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Herder, 2021; Lewis & Shah, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Mills, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). Some of these barriers are institutional and can be directly addressed by changing university policies, promoting instructor development, and creating an institutional climate from asset-based perspective that honors and values diverse students' experiences (Bensimon, 2007; McNair et al., 2016). I defined student success and outlined how instructors can positively impact student success (Bensimon, 2007; Booker et al., 2016;

Delima, 2019; Gist-Mackey, 2018; Hamman, 2018; Schreiner et al., 2012). This study addresses a gap in research and scholarship around effective teaching for historically underrepresented student success.

I explained my guiding theoretical framework – Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy – which combined critical care pedagogy with a student-ready institutional approach. This framework captured existing knowledge on the effectiveness of implementing care and a social justice perspective (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Dadvanad & Cuervo, 2020; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2017; Hambacher & Bondy, 2016; hooks, 2003, 2018; Kincheloe, 2008; Lane, 2018; Noddings, 2003, 2005). It also extended this knowledge to intentionally incorporate an asset-based approach that recognizes the institution's role in removing barriers to student success (McNair, et al., 2016). This study was timely and had the potential for real impact on the real lives of students. It had the potential to yield ideas for faculty development, and it advanced Ohio State's goals for improving the academic success of these student populations. In the next chapter, I outline the conceptual framework of my study, including my epistemological approach, case study design, data collection methods, my positionality, and the limitations of my study.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory instrumental case study was to understand how instructors supported the academic success of historically underrepresented students (first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color) who were struggling academically. The research questions which guided this case study were:

1. How do historically underrepresented students (HUS) understand academic success and struggle?

2. How do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?

3. How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS?

4. How do instructors enact academic support for HUS?

In this chapter I review the epistemological and methodological choices that guided my study. I begin with an overview of the critical-constructivist paradigm that informed my research. I then explain case study methodology and my choice of research methods. The chapter concludes with considerations of trustworthiness, researcher positionality, and potential ethical issues.

Epistemological Perspective

An epistemological perspective explains how a researcher knows the world and their motives for designing a study and engaging in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018b;

Levitt, 2021). This research design was guided by a critical-constructivist epistemology (Levitt, 2021). This epistemology blends elements from differing worldviews: critical theory and constructivism. The critical theory perspective illuminates how power and oppression impact context and meaning; research is used to create conditions for justice and empowerment for the oppressed (Kincheloe et al., 2018; Levitt, 2021). Through the constructivist lens, research is contextual and meaning is constructed through interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a; Levitt, 2021). I was guided by critical-constructivist epistemology because I wanted to understand how instructors and students constructed meaning. I also wanted to consider how this meaning impacted historically underserved populations, including how it reinforced existing power dynamics or liberated students who have been failed by the existing power structure. Both epistemological perspectives were essential for this study, which I explain below.

Critical Theory

Critical theory was developed by the Frankfurt School of social theorists, including Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse (Darder et al., 2017). Framed by the historical context of the rise of Nazi Germany and the development of Marxism, the Frankfurt School theorists emphasized joining theory and practice for the explicit goal of liberation and transformation of a socially unjust world (Darder et al., 2017). Critical theory projects typically begin from a researcher's desire to understand power relations and how conditions of justice and emancipation can be created (Bryant & Charmaz, 2013). Critical theorists try to illuminate how current practices are shaped by oppression and injustice

64

and support the power of the dominant groups (Levitt, 2021). Critical theory is an appropriate perspective for understanding the experiences of HUS.

This epistemological perspective is informed by the belief that there is no one social reality. Reality is understood and analyzed through power relations and is rooted in specific contexts of oppression (Kincheloe et al., 2018). This perspective critiques the prevailing neoliberal and capitalist ideologies and emphasizes a social justice agenda (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a; Kincheloe et al., 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Levitt, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2018; Manfra, 2019). Perhaps the hallmark of critical theory is its insistence on creating conditions for social justice, empowerment, and liberation. This critical worldview informed my decision to focus on HUS. Additionally, this worldview informed data collection and analysis.

Constructivism

I also adopted elements of a constructivist epistemology, viewing meaning as constructed through interactions between students and instructors in a social process. Constructivist epistemology holds there is not a single, observable, universal truth or reality (Lincoln et al., 2018). From a constructivist lens, people construct reality through social interaction and develop a consensus on what is real, therefore knowledge is value-laden and research is contextual (Caro-Bruce & Klehr, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a, 2018b; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lincoln et al., 2018; Manfra, 2019).

Constructivism aligns well with a case study methodology. First, constructivist epistemology is exploratory and descriptive (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It is also relevant for a case study that requires emerging design. Constructivist epistemology places the

focus on how participants and researchers work together to construct meaning as well as how the study design evolves as the understanding of the topic grows (Levitt, 2021). This worldview informed how I analyzed data and my interpretation of how students and instructors constructed the meaning of support for academic success.

Critical-Constructivism

As both epistemological approaches were appropriate for this study, I bridged them with critical-constructivist epistemology. First, I acknowledge tensions between these two worldviews. Critical theory provides a comprehensive basis for social criticism and intentionally focuses on issues of empowerment and justice, whereas constructivism does not align with any particular issues or goals, and could be apolitical (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018b; Kincheloe et al., 2018). Constructivism focuses on understanding and interpreting how individuals ascribe meaning to their own actions, whereas critical theory recognizes contextual and social forces that shape individuals' actions and choices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018b; Kincheloe et al., 2018). Constructivism does not explicitly critique how knowledge is produced and whose perspectives are (or are not) included in that production (Jaekel, 2021). While both approaches reject the idea of a neutral or unbiased researcher, constructivism situates bias in the researcher's subjectivity, while critical theory ascribes bias to power differentials between the researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018b; Kincheloe et al., 2018). Nevertheless, bridging the two approaches can be effective.

Critical-constructivism extends constructivism to take into consideration how social, cultural, and historical contexts inform individual meaning-making. It takes into

account how some forms of knowledge are privileged and others are not, which directly impacts the processes of knowledge production through teaching and learning (Jaekel, 2021). Critical-constructivist epistemology was outlined by Levitt (2021):

> This approach asks researchers to consider the experience or practice under study in relation to (a) how and why meanings are formed interpersonally; (b) how privilege, oppression, and systemic difference influence experiences; and (c) how the research context (and its power dynamics) shapes findings (p. 14).

This epistemological approach can be used to challenge dominant narratives about how social interaction works (Levitt, 2021). Both critical theory and constructivist epistemologies recognize that the researcher and participant are going to interact, and this will influence the research process. Combining these two epistemologies intentionally challenges the idea that research is neutral.

Just as the learning process is influenced by the perspectives of the teacher and the curriculum, which privilege certain identities (Jaekel, 2021), the research process is always shaped by both the researcher's way of making meaning of the data as well as larger systems of power. The critical-constructivist lens asks the researcher to analyze what is both explicit and implicit in the data, while keeping in mind personal and system dynamics (Levitt, 2021). To do this, the researcher must state, examine, and challenge their assumptions throughout the process, as well as report any biases that influenced the study (Levitt, 2021). I address issues of positionality and trustworthiness later in this chapter. First, I detail case study methodology and my rationale for using it in this study.

Case Study Method and Rationale

A methodology is a strategic plan for research (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative

design utilized case study methodology to explore how instructors supported HUS.

Qualitative research focuses on describing and exploring relationships, rather than

explaining, controlling, or predicting variables (Stake, 1995). In a qualitative research

study, the researcher examines people in their natural settings and tries to make visible

their meaning-making practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a). I chose a qualitative

methodology because I explored and described the phenomenon and context, rather than

explaining or predicting, and the phenomenon of interest was not readily quantifiable.

Additionally, qualitative methodology aligned with my epistemological view, which is

essential for a research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a).

Although many case studies adopt a post-positivist paradigm, case studies are

useful for constructivist approaches because this methodology allows for capturing

different perspectives and multiple meanings (Yin, 2018). A case study approach aligned

with my critical-constructivist epistemology. It allowed for collecting multiple forms of

data to establish thick description and understand how people make sense of the world

and why they take specific actions. An advantage of this approach is that it can allow for

greater insight (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study approach also

aligns with developing a holistic view (Simons, 2009).

Case study methodology is relevant to studies that ask how or why research

questions (Yin, 2018). A case study is an appropriate methodology for topics that are

contemporary, not historical, where the researcher has no control over the phenomenon

being studied (Yin, 2018). I asked how and why questions about a current phenomenon of instructor practices, and I did not have control over the instructors or students. Thus, case study methodology aligned well with this goal. A case study can reveal why and how decisions were made, and the corresponding result (Schramm, 1971). Case studies are useful for understanding specific issues or problems within a phenomenon and how these are resolved (Stake, 1995). A case study allows a researcher to examine a real-life issue in context.

I selected an exploratory case study as opposed to an explanatory approach. An exploratory case study is ideal for examining an issue about which little is known (A. Mills et al., 2010b). It is used when a research context is not clearly specified, when concepts are not clearly specified, or when there is not a clear set of outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; A. Mills et al., 2010b; Yin, 2018). In comparison, an explanatory case study explains phenomenon and highlights "causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.547). My research questions concerned how both students and instructors defined academic success, how students identified instructors who supported them, and what actions these instructors took.

Although existing higher education research supports knowledge of this student population, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the gap around what specific actions instructors take. Therefore, it was an exploratory study because I could not define instructor actions at the outset, which means this study could not focus on explanations. Although the results of the study might potentially show linkages between specific

faculty behaviors and student success, that would inform a future explanatory study, not the current exploratory study.

Within a case study, a "case" is a unit that allows for in-depth study (Saldaña, 2011). It is a purposeful, bounded system that has specific elements of context, time, and place; it can be concrete, or it can be a relationship or process (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). A case is typically chosen deliberately for its uniqueness (intrinsic case study), strategically for its representativeness (instrumental case study), or conveniently because it is intended to reveal insight into practice (non-research case study; Saldaña, 2011; Yin, 2018). The "case" in this instrumental case study consisted of the practices that instructors used to support the academic success of this population. This study was not a "non-research" case study because it was situated in existing literature and I sought to answer specific research questions (Saldaña, 2011). Additionally, this was a critical case study, as opposed to an unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal case study (Yin, 2018). To label a case as critical implies that the case is essential to understanding a theory or set of propositions about what is happening (Yin, 2018). The case selected for this study was critical to understanding how HUS are supported in their academic success.

A case needs boundaries to determine the scope of data collection and to firm up the connection between the case and the research questions (Yin, 2018). A case study typically has spatial boundaries that serve an organizational purpose (A. Mills et al., 2010a). I used an emergent research design, where the case context and boundaries were partly informed by the initial data collection. The boundaries of my case were defined as

the specific practices of Ohio State instructors who supported the academic success of HUS (first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color) who were experiencing academic struggle. The instructors who made up the case were determined after reviewing student nominations (further discussed in my sampling strategies). Students chose to nominate current or former instructors at Ohio State. They nominated tenure-track faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and lecturers. Therefore, the boundaries of the case were actions taken by instructors at Ohio State, in any discipline, who taught historically underrepresented undergraduates and supported their academic success.

I elected to use a single-case design "to study a specific phenomenon arising from a particular entity" rather than comparing across multiple cases (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p. 7). However, a multiple-case study across different institutions could be conducted in the future to further strengthen the research findings. This study used instrumental case design as I wanted to understand the phenomenon of teacher support through a specific case (Stake, 1995). Additionally, I used an embedded single-case design which has multiple levels of analysis, rather than a holistic design that focuses on one level of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). I conducted analysis across and between individual instructors and student participants.

In choosing instructors to participate for my study, I looked for participants who could most effectively contribute to my understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; S. R. Jones et al., 2014). Schwandt and Gates (2018) suggested this may include choosing participants who are the most likely and/or least likely to match my tentative thoughts about the case. For example, based on existing literature, a researcher might be

inclined to suspect that instructors of STEM courses are least likely to enact practices to support HUS (e.g., Codallo et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2020; Harper, 2010). In this instance, including these participants in my study challenged common assumptions.

Thus far I have explained my epistemological and methodological approach to the study of how instructors supported students from historically underrepresented populations who were struggling academically. I now discuss the research methods used in this study.

Research Methods

I start by highlighting the research context and discussing sampling criteria. My study consisted of three phases: (1) collecting questionnaire data from students to inform selection of instructor participants, (2) collecting interview data from students, (3) collecting interview and observation data from instructors who were nominated. Figure 4 illustrates my three-phase data collection process. I outline my methods of data collection and provide a rationale for each method. I also explain how these methods connected to my research questions. Lastly, I provide an outline of the data analysis strategies I used.
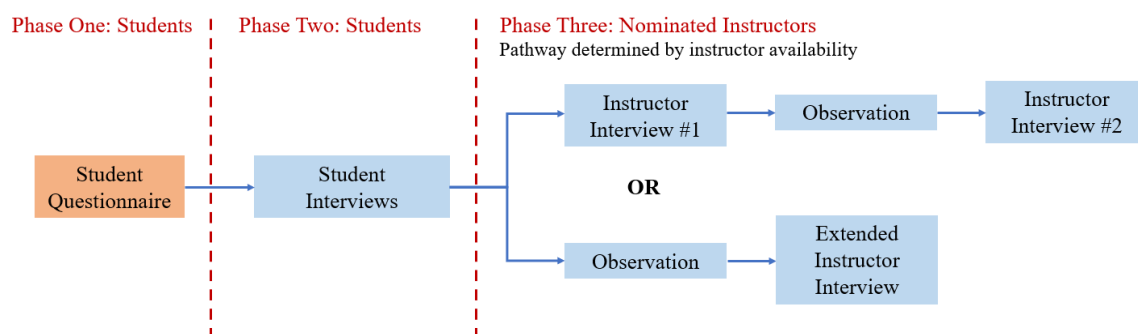
Figure 4. Outline of Data Collection Process

Research Context

It is essential in a case study to define the boundaries of the case and explain the

context in which the case is situated (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This enables the researcher

to better understand how the case relates to the bounded system (Jones et al., 2014). The

larger context impacts research study design and data analysis (Jones et al., 2014). In this

study, the case consisted of the practices that instructors used to support the academic

success of this population. I now provide insight into the larger context for the case.

This study was conducted at The Ohio State University, a large, urban, public

research university in Ohio. Ohio State is an 1862 Land-Grant institution, meaning it was

established with funding provided through land and land scrip in accordance with the

First Morrill Act (7 U.S.C. 301 et seq.). Further, it is a Predominantly White Institution,

meaning more than 50% of the student population identifies as White (Franklin, 2016). In

2020, the breakdown of historically underrepresented domestic undergraduate

populations was as follows: 1649 first-generation (19.2%); 1412 Pell-grant recipients (a

proxy for low-income; 16.4%); and 2086 Students of Color (24.3%) (Office of Student

Academic Success, 2020).

I selected Ohio State for my research site because of the institutional emphasis on

supporting the success of historically underrepresented students. Access for and retention

of this population was an institutional priority at the time of this study (Ohio State

University Office of the President, 2021). In chapter two, I described some of student-

centered initiatives, such as SpringForward, Buckeyes First, and the Young Scholars

summer bridge program. In addition to student-programming, the Drake Institute for

Teaching and Learning at Ohio State has offered an increasing number of faculty

trainings on issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, in addition to teaching

endorsements in areas like inclusive teaching (Michael V. Drake Institute for Teaching

and Learning, 2019). These current practices and priorities made Ohio State an ideal

context in which to situate this study.

Additionally, I had direct access to the participants I included in my study. I had

existing relationships with the students who participated in the first and second phases of

my study. This was useful not only for sampling purposes, but also because existing

relationships helped for building rapport. Rapport is essential for collecting trustworthy

qualitative data; it helps with securing participants, sustaining their participation, and

soliciting their honest and authentic thoughts (Glesne, 2011; S. R. Jones et al., 2014).

Conversely, I had not previously met any of the instructors in the third phase of my study.

In the first phase of this study, I drew upon the population of students who

completed an academic enrichment program in the summer before their sophomore year

("Success Program"). The Success Program provided academic skills training, academic coaching, and advising for rising sophomores who struggled academically during their first year at Ohio State. My connection to the Success Program will be addressed later in this chapter. Students self-selected into the program based on outreach and recruitment, or they were referred to the program by university staff, typically an academic advisor.

Once a student completed the Success Program, they were considered a "graduate." Table 5 highlights the specific details of how many Success Program graduates were enrolled at Ohio State in autumn semester 2021. Many of the students in the earlier Success Program cohorts (summer 2017 through summer 2019) graduated from the university, which explains why the number of students enrolled for autumn semester was so small for those cohorts.

Table 5. Population of Success Program Graduates

Cohort Year	Students Who Completed Summer Program	Students Enrolled in Autumn 2021 Semester
Summer 2017	34	3
Summer 2018	37	11
Summer 2019	19	14
Summer 2020	55	44
Summer 2021	73	71
Total	218	143

Sampling Criteria

Given the importance of establishing a bounded case, a careful sampling strategy is essential in a case study (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). Qualitative case studies use purposeful sampling, the goal of which is to identify participants who have experienced

the process or action and who can help the researcher best explore the phenomenon, understand the problem, and answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Sampling criteria are the characteristics of participants that are necessary for answering the research questions and might include both demographic variables and specific experiences (Jones et al., 2014).

There were two different sets of participants in this study: students and instructors. For the purposes of this study, student participants must have:

1. Been a graduate of the Success Program

2. Identified as a first-generation student, low-income student, and/or Student of Color

3. Been enrolled as an undergraduate at Ohio State in autumn semester 2021

4. Experienced academic struggle

Additionally, for the purposes of this study, instructor participants must have:

1. Been a present or past instructor of record of any component (lecture, lab, recitation) of a credit-bearing academic course at Ohio State

2. Been employed by the university in any role during spring semester 2022

3. Contributed to a diversity of experiences and/or identities

In the following sections I explain how I identified these participants and my rationale for selecting them.

Undergraduate Students

Through my role with the Success Program, I worked with a population of HUS who struggled to find academic success in college. This population included students

who identified as first-generation, low-income, and/or as a Student of Color. A total of 143 students were invited to participate in the first phase of the study. I limited the population to students who were enrolled in the current term because some previous students chose to take a leave of absence or transfer from the university, some graduated, and others were academically dismissed. Focusing on active students increased the likelihood of participation and facilitated my ability to locate and contact them. Students who completed the questionnaire in the first phase of my study were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with me for phase two. Student interviews yielded useful insights about instructor behaviors and how they enacted support.

The population of Success Program graduates was ideal because program staff intentionally targeted HUS populations for enrollment. Admission to the summer opportunity was based on several criteria, including the student's overall academic performance (academic need for the program), Pell Grant-eligibility (financial need for the program), and identity markers such as race/ethnicity or first-generation status (social need for the program). The designations of first-generation and Student of Color were provided via University Admissions data. The designation of low-income was based on data from Student Financial Aid. I chose to work with Success Program graduates because the identification of underrepresented students was already determined.

Instructors

For the purposes of this study, I defined "instructor" as any instructor of record for any component (lecture, lab, recitation) of a credit-bearing undergraduate course at Ohio State. This included but was not limited to tenure-track faculty, lecturers, graduate

assistants, and staff. Participants could nominate any instructor who they believed supported their academic success. I remained open to recruiting instructors who taught in-person, hybrid, and/or online, and in any discipline. I chose to limit participants to those who taught a formal credit-bearing course, and not include those who taught workshops or other programming. To support this focus, I asked students to name both the instructor and the specific course department and number.

In this study I focused on instructors who were still currently employed by the university. Lecturers, graduate assistants, and staff may turnover from year to year, which could have presented a barrier to access and participation in the study. As part of reviewing student nominations, I verified instructor names in the Ohio State directory to see if they were still employed by the university. Due to potential conflicts of interest, I did not include any professional staff who directly supported the Success Program in the instructor participant pool.

Participant Diversity

The primary sampling strategy for a case study is to select participants who can best provide insight into the case (S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). As such, I was interested in a student sample that included historically underrepresented identities. The Success Program enrolled a diverse group of students, each of whom reflected one or more identities under focus in my study, along with a variety of other social identities, such as ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and ability status. They came from a range of majors and academic departments across the university and represented all class ranks (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).

78

This study utilized an emergent design. The instructors I invited to participate in the third phase of the study were determined by student nominations in phase one. The goal was to select both student and instructor participants who could provide an array of insights into how instructors supported the academic success of this population (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). Some factors I took into consideration included: instructors who taught at different course levels (e.g., 1000- versus 4000-level), instructors who taught general education courses versus advanced courses in the major, and instructors who did or did not share social identities with historically marginalized groups. I also included a variety of instructor types (tenure-track faculty, lecturers, graduate assistants, staff) and instructional formats (e.g., in-person, hybrid, online). The latter was important because instruction format could influence instructors' strategies. I further discuss participant diversity in chapter four and in the limitations section of chapter five.

Sampling Strategies

Scholars debate whether a sample size should be specified in a qualitative research study as sample size is a post-positivist concept (Jones et al., 2014). The appropriate sample size is not a specific number, but rather, a minimum amount needed to reach saturation – which may not be determinable in advance. On the other hand, Creswell (2013) specifically recommended including no more than four or five participants in the bounded case. This supports a robust analysis while also keeping the quantity of data more manageable (Creswell, 2013). From both perspectives, the goal is to generate thick description from a small, purposeful group of participants. I ultimately

followed Jones et al.'s (2014) guidelines and kept recruiting participants until I reached

data saturation. The case was created through the following sampling procedures:

1. I distributed a questionnaire to 143 Success Program graduates and asked them to nominate the instructors they believe supported their academic success.

2. I reviewed the list of 25 students who completed the questionnaire and removed data from four students who did not self-identify as first-generation, low-income, and/or Student of Color. I invited the remaining 21 students to participate in a follow-up interview.

3. Based on the list of 21 instructor nominations, I determined who was still employed at the university (all but one). I invited those 21 instructors to participate in interviews and observations.

I viewed students as expert nominators for this study because of their direct experiences. I kept an asset-based, student-ready focus by relying on student nominations to inform my instructor sampling. This also helped eliminate my presumptions about the relevance of specific identities (Roderick, 2009).

Data Collection Methods

I have introduced my research context and explained my sampling criteria and strategies. I now explain my data collection methods. The most robust case studies utilize a variety of data collection methods (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Typically this includes interviews, observations, and document analysis (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Using multiple sources of evidence addresses trustworthiness (explored later in this

chapter; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). It also allows for collecting as much detail as possible to generate the thick description that illuminates the case. Lastly, each method has its own strengths and limitations, so using a variety of methods helps balance these out. I used three data collection methods: qualitative questionnaire, interviews, and observations.

Questionnaires

In phase one, I asked students to complete a qualitative questionnaire. Qualitative questionnaires are elicited documents, meaning the participants generate the data (Charmaz, 2014). They are useful for gathering descriptive, exploratory data (Jansen, 2010). They can capture participants' unique experiences and determine meaningful variation around a topic (Braun et al., 2020; Jansen, 2010). Qualitative questionnaires have the capability of generating rich data if meaningful questions are asked and if participants believe the study is relevant to their world (Braun et al., 2020; Charmaz, 2014). Typically, a qualitative questionnaire includes both demographic and open-ended questions. Demographic data collection is more successful and more sensitive to participants' needs when it includes both a definition for each demographic trait and an explanation of why the data is being collected (Braun et al., 2020). Successful open-ended questions are generally concise, unambiguous, and exploratory (Braun et al., 2020; Jansen, 2010). However, to help with clarification of participants' experiences, Braun et al. (2020) suggested adding the qualifier "please explain in detail."

In this study, I used a qualitative questionnaire to collect student nominations of instructors they believe supported their academic success (see Appendix B). I asked

students demographic questions to capture which of the historically underrepresented identities applied to them. Students were asked to provide their own definition of academic success and struggle. I then asked them to nominate an instructor and explain why they chose that instructor or how that instructor supported them. Five names were drawn at random from the pool completed submissions to receive compensation in the form of a $10 Amazon gift card. The qualitative survey was appropriate for helping answering these research questions: (1) how do HUS understand academic success and struggle? and (2) how do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?

Interviews

Interviews are the most commonly used method in qualitative case studies (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). They are useful for generating explanations of events and processes (Yin, 2018). Interviews provide perhaps the best opportunity to gather in-depth information on a participant's thoughts and experiences (Simons, 2009). This is partly because interview protocols can be adjusted as needed and supplementary questions can be asked along the way. I followed Yin's (2018) recommendation of using a semi-structured protocol. A semi-structured protocol can be adjusted, as sometimes what interviewees say beyond the scope of the questioning is the most relevant or useful data (Brinkmann, 2018).

Student Interviews.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with students who completed the questionnaire in phase one. I used the interview protocol that is included in Appendix D.

82

The goal of the student interviews was to gather additional data about why the instructor was nominated, including students' perceptions of the instructor's teaching style and the ways in which academic support is enacted. As Noddings (2003) pointed out, the cared-for person defines the caring relationship. Further, since the goal of data collection was to generate thick description, student interviews were important data collection points because students directly experienced the enactment of support.

Instructor Interviews.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with six instructors who had been nominated by students. The goal of the instructor interviews was to obtain in-depth information about their approaches to teaching and their understandings of student success and struggle. Interview protocols are included in Appendices F and G. For the extended interviews, I combined questions from both protocols.

Interview Procedures.

My semi-structured interview protocols asked issue-oriented questions that invited participants to describe personal experiences directly relating to the research questions (Stake, 1995). My interview questions connected with either research questions one and two (student-focused) or three and four (instructor-focused). Since the student participants already knew me, I needed to intentionally include questions that collected data that they might have assumed I already knew. For example, unless prompted, they might not have shared details of their first-year academic struggle because we previously discussed these concerns together in advising appointments or through course assignment submissions. I intentionally brought these data points to light through my questioning.

I conducted all student interviews and five instructor interviews on Zoom considering COVID-19 concerns. The sixth instructor requested to be interviewed in-person. Student interviews lasted 25-30 minutes. Each student who participated in an interview was compensated with a $15 Amazon gift card. For three instructors, I conducted an initial interview of about 45 minutes, followed by a class observation, followed by a second interview of 15-20 minutes. For the other three instructors, I observed their class and then conducted one extended interview of 50-60 minutes.

Direct Observation

Stake (1995) defined the goal of direct observation as establishing a "good record of events to provide a relatively *incontestable description* for further analysis and reporting" (p. 62). Direct observations are an especially useful method for generating data about physical context (Stake, 1995). Observations are particularly useful for case studies as they help explore a real-world phenomenon in a contemporary setting (Yin, 2018). Observations need to be detailed and include both context and interactions (Yin, 2018). These are usually documented via researcher field notes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through observation, the researcher should strive to help the reader picture being there, observing the phenomenon in real time (Yin, 2018).

I used observations to help answer these research questions: (3) how do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS? and (4) how do instructors enact support for HUS? I asked instructors for permission to observe one session of a class they were currently teaching. For two instructors, this was the same course that the nominator took with them. For the other four instructors, it was a different

84

course, because they had different teaching assignments during the spring semester. However, useful data about instructor style and interactions were still gathered even if it was a different course. Observations allowed me to capture a deeper understanding of instructor practice that an instructor might not be able to articulate through an interview. It also allowed for directly capturing the interactive relationship between instructor and students. My observation protocol is included in Appendix H. Data were triangulated across observations to strengthen my conclusions.

I used a semi-structured observation protocol that aligned with my general theoretical framework. I focused on instructor-student interactions, as well as the instructor's organization and teaching methods. I looked for direct or implied messaging around classroom about expectations and the instructor-student relationship. I also captured details about the setting. I also counted instructor interactions and noted specific behaviors or quotes. Overall, observation is a complex process that is highly dependent on what the researcher interprets as relevant in real time (Simons, 2009), but help with building thick descriptions of the case.

Table 6 presents a summary of my research methods and how they connected to my research questions.

Table 6. Summary of Research Methods and Their Connection to Research Questions

Question	Method
1. How do students in this population understand academic success and struggle?	Questionnaire Interview
2. How do students in this population identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?	Questionnaire Interview
3. How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for this population?	Interview Direct observation
4. How do instructors enact academic support for this population?	Interview Direct observation

Each of these three data collection methods yielded rich data. Taken together, they helped

me create a thick, rich description of the case. To develop this description, I utilized

specific data analysis strategies, which I will now review.

Data Analysis

I used both the direct interpretation and categorical aggregation approaches to

analyzing my case study data (Stake, 1995). Direct interpretation involved analyzing each

participant's contributions independently, and not in relation to others in the study (Stake,

1995). Categorical aggregation involved putting individuals' understandings together to

make meaning, for example, combining all instructors' contributions and looking for

meaning across the group (Stake, 1995). Applying this to my study, I examined each

participant's understandings separately and then as a group. I used the constant

comparative method, which involves comparing datum within and between collection

sources, looking for concepts that are similar or different (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This

86

method is akin to the pattern-matching process recommended for exploratory single case studies (Yin, 2018). Constant comparison is typically used during both the data collection and analyses procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). If I started to notice patterns during data collection, I recorded them in memos and refer to them during analysis.

A variety of coding strategies can be utilized with the constant comparative method (Saldaña, 2011). I analyzed data using multiple rounds of coding. I began with attribute coding, which involved coding for descriptive information, such as demographics (Saldaña, 2021). Next, I used structural coding to code and categorize chunks of passages in the questionnaire and interview data, which aligns with the categorical aggregation approach to analyzing case study evidence (Saldaña, 2021; Stake, 1995). I also used descriptive coding based on the topics of my observation data. I then conducted a round of in vivo coding, which uses codes based on participants' verbatim words, and values coding, which involving coding to uncover values, attitudes, and beliefs. These methods reflected the direct interpretation approach to case study analysis (Stake, 1995). Finally, I categorized my codes into themes that capture patterns of major ideas.

My guiding framework – Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy – helped sensitize me to patterns, such as specific enactments of care. Further, my personal and professional experience with this student population created theoretical sensitivity which informed what I looked for in my analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). However, I did not limit myself to these patterns. To help with this, I intentionally looked for plausible rival explanations that show how the analysis might have been different if the rival explanation

was the real explanation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Yin, 2018). Table 7 summarizes my

data analysis procedures for specific data collection types.

Table 7. Data Analysis Procedures

Method	Protocol notes	Analysis procedures
Questionnaire	Included demographic questions linked to underrepresented status; a space for nominating instructors; and open-ended questions about how and why participants feel supported	Attribute coding In vivo coding Values coding
Interviews	Semi-structured interviews prompted participants to give descriptions of their experiences and actions (Brinkmann, 2018); used guiding theoretical framework to inspire questions, particularly questions around critical issues of power and systemic barriers	Attribute coding Structural coding In vivo coding Values coding
Observations	Included date, time, and place of observation; description of setting; purpose of the observation; description of participants; activities that take place; noteworthy conversations; unique details; and my interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015)	Attribute coding Structural coding Descriptive coding In vivo coding

After gathering data, I assigned pseudonyms to each of the six instructor participants:

Alexis, Ben, Chase, Donna, Elijah, and Heather. Since the instructors' actions were the

focus of this study, assigning names enabled me to provide more cohesive narratives. I

did not assign pseudonyms to the student participants as they were not the primary focus

of the study, nor was it necessary for me to create detailed profiles for them. This decision also helped protect student anonymity.

Limitations

As Yin (2018) explained, case study methodology is relevant for understanding contemporary situations in which the researcher has no control over the phenomenon. Case study methodology was well-suited to my study; however, limitations exist. It can be difficult to process and carefully analyze the large amount of data generated from multiple collection methods (Heale & Twycross, 2018). It can also be easy to wander away from the focus of the research during data analysis, or as Yin (2018) described, the phenomenon of study becomes the context instead of the case. During the data analysis phase, I needed to be careful to focus on the overall case rather than just one unit of analysis (Yin, 2018).

There were also limitations to case study design. Single-case studies are not as robust as multiple-case studies, as the latter present more opportunities to dig deep into a phenomenon and compare across cases (Yin, 2018). However, a single case study can still "represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory" (Yin, 2018, p. 49). This speaks to issues of transferability, which I will address later in this chapter. An exploratory case study is not intended to provide an explanation of a phenomenon (A. Mills et al., 2010b). This means the results can inform future research, but the researcher needs to be careful drawing firm conclusions or trying to generate a theory.

The methods I used also have limitations, which is why it is important to use more than one data collection method. Interviews require the researcher to remain conversational while keeping participants on track (Simons, 2009). Further, interviews involve participants who may or may not share similar social identities to the researcher, which can impact rapport and trust-building (Jones et al., 2014). The researcher must also work to avoid (and/or acknowledge) their biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Open-ended questionnaires cannot provide in-depth information unless the right questions are asked (Braun et al., 2020). Further, not all participants will be equally articulate, and some may provide only short answers that do not contain much data (Charmaz, 2014). Unlike interviews, a questionnaire does not allow the researcher to probe for more information. The most significant limitation to direct observation is the fact the researcher is an intrusion, which can disrupt the natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Nevertheless, each of these methods are appropriate for my study, and when taken together, can capture rich data.

Trustworthiness

At its core, trustworthiness addresses how a researcher might be wrong (Maxwell, 2013). This concept is used in qualitative study designs to establish whether the research findings and conclusions are authentic, meaningful, and useful (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). In qualitative research, this construct is frequently referred to as trustworthiness rather than validity, as validity is typically associated with post-positivist paradigms and may not be effective for a constructivist approach (Lincoln et

al., 2018). In this section, I address specific strategies for trustworthiness, along with researcher positionality and ethical issues.

Trustworthiness Strategies

Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommended using several trustworthiness strategies within a study. In Table 8, I outline these trustworthiness strategies and how I addressed them (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2018; S. R. Jones et al., 2014; Ridder, 2017; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Table 8. Trustworthiness Strategies

Strategy	Definition	How it Helps	What I Did
Triangulation	Comparing findings across multiple methods, sources, and perspectives	Creates a deeper understanding, generates extra knowledge, checks discrepant cases against findings	Verified if themes, instances, and actions were the same across multiple participants and data sources (data source, theoretical, and methodological triangulation)
Thick, rich description	Give enough detail so "almost anyone, who had our opportunity to observe it, would have noticed and recorded as much as we did" (Stake, 1995, p. 110)	Embeds the reader in the setting; illustrates how findings were constructed; helps establish "analytic generalizability" (Yin, 2018)	Built trust with participants; used multiple data sources; offered many different perspectives; used highly descriptive language; included quotes
Clarifying bias	Self-reflection into how a researcher may be influenced by their own identities and biases	Explains how findings might be shaped by a researcher's background	Explicitly stated my positionality; explained how personal experiences impacted data collection and analysis

Table 8 Continued

Strategy	Definition	How it Helps	What I Did
Including negative or discrepant information	Presenting contradictory evidence that challenges tentative findings and/or the guiding theoretical framework	Helps reduce bias; clarifies guiding theoretical framework; helps build a realistic assessment	Matched patterns (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018); intentionally looked for confirming and disconfirming instances
Prolonged time in the field	Gaining plenty of experience in the setting by spending sufficient time	Develops an in-depth understanding and lends credibility	Used multiple research methods which allowed me to spend more time in the field (i.e., both interviews and observations)
Peer debriefing	Relying on a trusted peer to review the study and ask questions	Challenges researcher bias and points out things the researcher is overlooking	Asked trusted peers to review my findings and provide feedback
Memoing	"Written records of a researcher's thinking" (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11)	Build reliability through documenting procedures	Documented my research procedures throughout the process; wrote memos after each interview or observation; wrote memos regularly during data analysis

Another significant aspect of trustworthiness in research studies is generalizability. Generalizability addresses whether the research findings can be applied to a broader population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Generalizability is not typically the goal of qualitative research. Qualitative research involves interpreting meaning, which is

92

not usually generalizable because it is situated in a specific context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a). This is especially true for qualitative case studies, which seek to understand the unique characteristics of a case (Stake, 1995). Instead, the concept of transferability may be more appropriate – the idea that something can be learned from this study that might have application to other studies and contexts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Transferability is often a concern about case study methodology (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) thought transferability was possible in the sense of expanding and generalizing theory (analytical generalizability) rather than trying to generalize findings to a broad population. The latter is typically the goal of quantitative research. Stake (1995) specifically stated, "We do not choose case study designs to optimize production of generalizations" (p. 8). Stake (1995) proposed naturalistic generalization, which is a conclusion made through experiencing a phenomenon and conveyed through rich, thick description

I would further argue that exploratory case studies, as opposed to explanatory, are not meant to be generalizable. They are meant to examine and clarify a specific phenomenon in context, not to explain or prove a theory (A. Mills et al., 2010b). However, lessons learned from a particular case study could be applied in the future; in particular, the guiding theoretical framework may be transferable (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Yin, 2018). For this "analytic generalization" to occur, a researcher must adopt, adapt, or reject their guiding framework, and/or add new concepts that arose from the data analysis (Yin, 2018).

Addressing issues of trustworthiness is critical for the success of a research study. I have outlined the several practical measures I took in this study. However, there are also philosophical and ethical issues to address. I will turn next to positionality.

Positionality

A researcher's connection to their participants and topic is known as positionality, and this influences the decisions a researcher makes at all stages of the study (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). While lived experience can influence the choice of topic and perhaps help develop stronger relationships, a researcher needs to acknowledge their insider and outsider status with respect to the population of study, in order to mitigate bias in data interpretation and analysis (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). Although a researcher may not have control over their identity categories or their subjective positions, they can determine how they will approach the research project with a self-awareness that allows them to maintain openness and curiosity (Glesne, 2011). In the interest of developing a trustworthy study, a researcher should reflect upon and acknowledge how their subjectivities impact the research process (S. R. Jones et al., 2014).

In the next section, I will address my positionality as a researcher. When I think of my positionality, I focus on two aspects: how I will relate to my participants on a personal level, and biases I may hold that could impact my research. In telling my story, I aim to share specific aspects of my identity and experiences that will shape these two aspects.

My Positionality Statement

I grew up just outside of Toledo, Ohio, in a rural area with many working-class families. In fact, my family tree is full of folks who worked in the auto industry, on the railroad, or as electricians or other journeymen – usually as members of a union. I internalized a working-class "ethos," which some scholars have characterized as loyalty, solidarity, a strong work ethic, a straightforward attitude, a belief in merit, a value of practical knowledge and common sense, and a disdain for family privilege and connections (Ardoin, 2019; Ardoin & martinez, 2019; Schultz, 2012; Thelin, 2019). I now see myself as a social class straddler (Ardoin & martinez, 2019) who has financially and professionally moved up in social class but who still retains many of those working-class values.

In their study of working-class college students, Williams & Martin (2021) wrote that this population tends to be very aware of their class status and how it impacts them in college, even if they lack the vocabulary for defining it. This was true for me. It was in my first week of college, in my American Government class, when I became aware that I was from a working-class background. During a discussion, the classmate sitting next to me announced matter-of-factly that anyone who was unemployed was lazy and unwilling to work, and therefore a drain on society. I stared at her in horror. Just a few months before, my dad was laid off from his job for the second time in his working career. My dad is one of the hardest-working people I know. I took her comments very personally as she continued to bemoan the "worthless, lazy people who take advantage of the system."

This was only the beginning of my journey as a working-class, first-generation student trying to navigate a private liberal arts college.

When I was an undergraduate (2001-2005), the concept of "first-generation" was not widely used. As such, I tended to conflate the two concepts and see my college struggles as a function of my class background, although I now understand that a student can be one and not the other. Technically I do not fit Ohio State's definition of first-generation as my father earned a Bachelor's degree while I was in high school, however, he earned it from a non-traditional weekend program for working adults. He did not pick up the knowledge and social capital that would have helped me with my transition to college.

I received a full-ride merit scholarship to attend this liberal arts college, where a significant number of students came from upper- or upper-middle class backgrounds – students who had generations of family members graduate from college, who could pay all their college costs out-of-pocket, who had fancy clothes and cars. I simply did not belong in their social world, and I found it difficult to relate to them. In response to feeling alienated, I retreated into upward class bias (Liu et al., 2004) and told myself I did not want to be friends with rich people, anyway. In addition, like so many other first-generation students I lacked basic knowledge about how college works. For example, I did not know my parents were supposed to stay for orientation and I had never seen a syllabus before. I had never felt so out of place.

I began this "infinite journey with questioning belonging and whether we are enough to be part of the academy" (Ardoin & martinez, 2019, p. 167). I distinctly

remember sitting in my faculty advisor's office in my first semester, crying over the fact I did not belong. I told him I was thinking of transferring back to the local community college. Instead of challenging my imposter syndrome, instead of pointing out my intellectual abilities, he just said, "maybe you should" and ended our meeting.

As it turned out, with my scholarship it was less expensive to go to this liberal arts school than it was to go to the hometown community college, so I stayed. I ended up graduating near the top of my class, earning several honors including the award for the best research paper written that year. The topic connected to my roots: a historical analysis of the Electric Auto-Lite factory strike in Toledo in 1934. Yet despite this success, I still struggled with belonging, even into graduate school and my professional career in the academy. Sometimes my position as a class straddler creates imposter syndrome on multiple levels – one foot in both worlds without belonging to either. A perfect example: during college, my boss at my summer job told me to "stop using those high falutin' college words" or else he would fire me.

In this respect, I can relate to some of the experiences my historically underrepresented students encounter, especially feeling like an imposter or lacking a sense of belongingness because of my social identities. The other way in which I relate to my students pertains to academic struggle. In my first year of college, I struggled with self-regulated learning, but once I figured out study strategies and time management, I achieved high grades. However, at the graduate level, nothing says academic struggle quite like quitting your Ph.D. program.

I was enrolled in a Doctoral program at Ohio State from 2009-2013. In the end,

struggling massively with imposter syndrome, a toxic graduate school culture, financial

burdens, and personal health issues, I walked away from a program I had almost

completed. I had passed my candidacy exams and written a dissertation prospectus, and I

still walked away. In the academy there seems to be stigma about leaving a program in

"All But Dissertation" status (ABD), as though doing so makes you a failure. I grappled

with a sense of failure for a few years after leaving that program. So while I did not

necessarily experience academic struggle in terms of course grades, I struggled with

many of the other measures, including motivation, academic program fit, finding a sense

of meaning, making timely progress, and clarifying and accomplishing my goals (Akos &

James, 2020; Johnson, 2013; Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019; Renzulli, 2015). Now, as an

instructor of a self-regulated learning course, I talk openly about my struggle and failure

(and my comeback in this second attempt at a Ph.D.). I intentionally normalize struggle

for my students as I do not see it as something to be ashamed of, but rather an

opportunity for growth.

My worldview and my academic work are shaped by these experiences. They are

also shaped by the critical, postmodern, and poststructural theories of education and

society that I studied in my first Doctoral program. My understanding of student success

is deepened by years of teaching and advising historically underrepresented students at

Ohio State. Listening to these students' testimonies opened my eyes to potential ways in

which higher education does not serve its purported goals of access, equity, and

inclusion. I am a higher education professional who wants to be in a position where I can

use my skills and abilities to advocate for students and guide them toward academic and personal success. I believe all my students have potential and higher education institutions need to do better when it comes to setting these students up for success.

I share some identities with my students, and this has helped me build strong rapport. However, my journey is my own and my study participants may have completely different experiences. Further, my privileged White identity has kept me from fully being able to understand the bias, discrimination, and microaggressions my Students of Color face daily. I have also needed to invest significant time and energy unlearning my race-based stereotypes and prejudices, many of which I acquired while growing up in a predominantly White working-class community. Grappling with my own racism is an ongoing process for me. So, as I conducted the study, I needed to be careful to interpret data from the viewpoint of my students and not impose my own experiences as a lens. I addressed this through regular memoing, data triangulation, and reflecting on the process with trusted friends. Engaging in this reflection addressed the ethical consideration of how to re-story participants' narratives, which is one of a few ethical issues.

Ethical Issues

There were three levels of ethical issues in this study: issues with students, instructors, and the institution. In this section, I address all three, beginning with students. One of strengths of qualitative research is the fact that relationship-building and reciprocity are inherent to the data collection and analysis process (Jones et al., 2014). Any discussion of methods needs to acknowledge the relationships that the researcher will need to build with the participants in order to gain their trust and thence their

knowledge (Maxwell, 2013). As I was a current academic advisor for students who were invited to participate in this study, I had previously met and interacted with all students who completed questionnaires and interviews. I had already established deep personal relationships with some of these students, particularly those in the 2020 and 2021 cohorts. In some ways, this contributed to an environment of trust and a stronger development of researcher-participant reciprocity (Simons, 2009). Yet it could also have led to an unbalanced power dynamic, where students felt obligated to participate in the study or responded to my questioning in specific ways.

In keeping with Noddings' (2003) understanding of a caring relationship, the students in my study may have interpreted my interest in their contributions as an act of care, and thus felt inclined to positively respond to my care. This raises a question of whether students were honest with me, or if they shared what they thought I wanted to hear or know. As Charmaz (2014) pointed out, "How your research participants identify you influences what they will tell you" (p. 29). This included how participants placed my position as researcher and my social identities. It also included perceptions of my credibility.

With respect to instructors as participants, I did not have a pre-existing relationship with any of the instructors. I needed to build new relationships and create trust. I disclosed to instructors that I was also a college instructor. I told them a little about my background to gain credibility. I stressed that the purpose of the project was not to critique instructors' behaviors, but rather to understand practices from an asset-based

view – what are instructors doing that is leading students to feel supported? I explicitly stated the goals of enhancing professional practice and the student classroom experience.

Further along the lines of building a caring relationship with my participants, I knew from working with these students on a regular basis that they believed some instructors care and others do not. Witnessing their stories was part of the inspiration for this research project. I also knew some of these students experienced traumatizing events in the classroom (supported by research – refer to the discussion in chapter two of the experiences of Students of Color, first-generation students, and low-income students). Asking students to share stories, whether through the questionnaire or the interviews, had the potential to provoke psychological or emotional vulnerability or distress (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). This required me to listen carefully and empathetically (Yin, 2018). Before each interview, I reminded participants that the study was voluntary and they could stop at any time. I kept on hand a list of sources of support that I could refer students to if needed (e.g., counseling support). All decisions in the research process needed to center around what was best for the participant (Jones et al., 2014).

Further, as I discussed in my positionality section, I needed to be mindful that I was asking the participants (instructors and students) to tell *their* stories. Although my research questions and my data collection protocols were framed to ask questions about the enactment of support strategies, I needed to be careful not to lead participants in a specific direction (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). To help with this, I asked my committee to review my protocols. I also memoed after each interview or observation to reflect on how

things went and in what ways I could improve. I also relied on my committee and consulted them throughout the process if an issue emerged (Jones et al., 2014).

In addition to power and positionality, confidentiality and anonymity are two important aspects of both trustworthiness and ethical research design. Confidentiality is essential for building participant trust so they will share honestly (Simons, 2009). This involves carefully crafting my interview and observation protocols. It also "means staying alert in the process to issues individuals wish to keep private" (Simons, 2009, p. 106) and respecting a participant's request not to include data (if asked). Anonymization is another important ethical issue, particularly for case studies, which specifically focus on an issue, which may make it easier to guess who the participants are (Simons, 2009). Data that is not anonymous has potential negative consequences for participants. The topic of this study is inherently political and revealing non-anonymous information about participants could have impacts on how they are judged or treated in the future. All student data in this study is unnamed and I assigned pseudonyms to the six instructors who participated. I also carefully reviewed my presentation of data findings to ensure no identifying characteristics were made known (Simons, 2009).

Perhaps a larger anonymization issue was directly using the name of the institution, Ohio State. Simons (2009) argued that high-profile or public figures "should not be anonymized as they are publicly accountable" (p. 108). However, a research project conducted within the context of the institution has the potential to result in negative portrayal. Possibly there are legal issues involved when naming the institution (Simons, 2009). Further, in this study, anonymizing the institution does not mean it will

102

not be obvious to which school I am referring. To ethically conduct this study, I needed to identify my relationship to participants and describe how I accessed them (through my involvement as their academic advisor). In future publications, a savvy reader can look up my organizational affiliation within Ohio State, and the publication will directly list my institutional affiliation. I decided to use the real name of the institution rather than a pseudonym.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overall review of my methodological approach to this exploratory instrumental case study. This included explicating my critical-constructivist epistemological position. I defined case study methodology and outlined specific elements pertinent to my chosen style of case study. Some initial boundaries were set around my case, keeping in mind the emergent design of my study. I explained my research context and sampling criteria. My approaches to collecting and analyzing data were highlighted and justified. Lastly, I reviewed issues of trustworthiness, positionality, and ethics, and how I addressed these issues.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this case study was to understand how instructors support the academic success of historically underrepresented students who are struggling academically at The Ohio State University. To support my understanding of the central phenomenon, I also examined how and why these students come to believe they are being supported and the perceived impact of this on their academic success. The four research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do historically underrepresented students (HUS) understand academic success and struggle?

2. How do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?

3. How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS?

4. How do instructors enact academic support for HUS?

To answer these questions, I used a case study methodological approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018), grounded in critical constructivist epistemology (Jaekel, 2021; Levitt, 2021). I collected questionnaire, interview, and observation data. My study consisted of three phases. In the first phase, I sent a questionnaire to 143 students from historically underrepresented backgrounds who had experienced academic struggle while enrolled at Ohio State. I asked them to nominate an instructor who they believed supported their

academic success and to provide their definition of academic success. A total of 25 students completed my questionnaire. I removed the responses from four students who did not self-identify with a historically underrepresented group. In the second phase, I set up interviews with students and interviews and observations with instructors. I invited 21 students to interview with me and 14 decided to participate. I conducted a 20-30 minute virtual interview with each student. In the third phase, I invited 21 instructors to participate in my study and six agreed. I conducted a 45-60 minute virtual interview with each instructor. I also observed one class session for each instructor. Additionally, two instructors agreed to a 15 minute follow up virtual interview after my class observation.

As detailed in chapter three, I analyzed data using multiple rounds of coding. I began with attribute coding, which involved coding for descriptive information, such as demographics (Saldaña, 2021). Next, I used structural coding to code and categorize chunks of passages in the questionnaire and interview data, which aligns with the categorical aggregation approach to analyzing case study evidence (Saldaña, 2021; Stake, 1995). I also used descriptive coding based on the topics of my observation data. I then conducted a round of in vivo coding, which uses codes based on participants' verbatim words, and values coding, which involved coding to uncover values, attitudes, and beliefs. These methods reflected the direct interpretation approach to case study analysis (Stake, 1995). Finally, I categorized my codes into themes that capture patterns of major ideas.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the detailed findings of my study. First, I provide some important evidence that contradicts the premise of my research questions.

Second, I share demographic data from the questionnaire. Third, I present student perspectives on academic success and struggle. Fourth, I discuss how students identify supportive instructors, share key themes from the data, and summarize student outcomes. Fifth, I present instructor profiles, which provide important context for understanding the case (the phenomenon of teaching strategies). Sixth, I highlight instructors' perspectives on academic success and struggle. I also introduce the three key instructor strategies for enacting support for this student population that emerged from thematic data analysis: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. Last, I provide insight into overlaps between student and instructor perspectives.

The Place of Identity: Contradictory Evidence

Before proceeding, it is important to point out some significant contradictory evidence that emerged from my data analysis. Intentionally looking for disconfirming evidence is an essential step in case study data analysis (Ridder, 2017; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Contradictory evidence in a case study can challenge a guiding theoretical framework, leading it to be strengthened (Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2018). This process of adapting a guiding framework due to new or disconfirming concepts is essential for case study findings to be transferable in the future (Yin, 2018). Additionally, acknowledging contradictory information helps build trustworthiness and reduces bias (Yin, 2018). Therefore, I explain how disconfirming evidence challenged an underlying tenet of my research questions.

While the research and interview questions emphasized the success and struggle of historically underrepresented populations, most students and instructors did not

conceptualize success and struggle in terms of identity. The idea of personal identity was not mentioned at all in the 21 questionnaire responses. Of the 14 students interviewed, only one brought up identity. She talked about the identity she shared with her instructor as a first-generation student from a low-income background:

He did for sure mention that he grew up not wealthy, poor. I don't know how that can go in conversation, but it did… I told him I want to end up making money. I don't want to get a degree and not have money. I told him, "I never grew up with money, so I definitely want to." And he said, "Yeah, I felt that. I also grew up poor." Being at a prestigious university, it feels like everybody there is just loaded, but it's really nice to see that there are people who are like me, who have similar backgrounds like me… and gave me the time of day.

This was the only student to mention identity on their own, unsolicited by me. When I asked students directly whether they had anything in common with their instructor and whether that mattered, only one student told me that it mattered to him that they have an identity in common. In fact, almost all the student participants in this study believed they had little to nothing in common with the instructors they nominated when it came to identity, nor did they think it mattered. The following interview quote from a student captures this sentiment:

Amy: Did you have anything in common with this professor and would it have mattered to you whether you did or not?

Student: I don't remember having anything in common with him and I feel like it didn't matter to me because I feel like every time I went to his office hours or

anything like that, I was just confused and I had a list of problems I wanted to get through during the hour of time that we had. And so even though we didn't have anything in common, I feel like it didn't really necessarily matter to me.

Although students did not necessarily agree that sharing identities was important, they did think that sharing experiences was important. For example:

> Amy: Did you have anything in common with him?
>
> Student: Yeah, he did mention that he was also struggling when he was in undergrad with mental health and all those types of things, and so that's why he was so open with that topic.

I further explore this idea of shared experiences later in this chapter. Overall, research questions one and two were informed by the literature review and based on the premise that individual identities are important to historically underrepresented students, and that this importance would be conveyed in their understandings of success, struggle, and instructors' actions. However, in my study, this seemed not to be prevalent for students or instructors.

When asked about historically underrepresented identities, all six instructors agreed they would likely be able to identify a Student of Color, based on appearances, provided they were not teaching an asynchronous online course. However, they would not know whether a student was first-generation or low-income unless that student divulged that information. As referenced in chapter three, I assigned pseudonyms to each of the six instructors in this study: Alexis, Ben, Chase, Donna, Elijah, and Heather. Ben said he only knew a student was first-generation because he saw it in their email

signature. Heather said she might suspect a student was from a low-income background if they happened to mention they were sending money home to family, but otherwise she would not know. Even still, these instructors still recognized that students from these populations might experience different types of struggles that impact their academic success. As Chase said, "Especially for all of my marginalized students, the objective reality is that shit's going to hit the fan more frequently than for the students that can just throw money at their problems."

When prompted to describe how they would support HUS, most instructors indicated that they would respond to any student the same way, regardless of identity and background. One exception was Heather, who said that if she is aware someone is a first-generation student, she intentionally puts more effort into making the hidden curriculum evident. Otherwise, the remaining instructors did not specifically try to tailor their approach. "I mean, I think that always being available and helping students in whatever way you can is just… I don't know that it's any different for any different background," Elijah said. "I think that in the end, [it's] how much you help people and that it just gets magnified with people that need it." Also, Chase commented that while he could guess that students in his class shared marginalized identities "based on statistical probabilities," it was most important for him "to go to the assumption that everybody's struggling with something, until proven otherwise."

All six instructors agreed it is fundamentally critical to believe that all students can learn, and to teach in a way that conveys this. In other words, if an instructor believes all students can learn, they will take action to support any student who is struggling

academically, regardless of identity factors. Thus, while my research questions three and four supposed that student identity would factor into instructors' approaches, based on the literature review, identity was not at the forefront for the instructors in this study.

My research questions were grounded in literature that suggested identity would be an important factor in the academic success of this student population. In the end, identity did not factor in the way that I anticipated. I provide more on this in the Limitations section of chapter five. Nonetheless, the data collection methods yielded rich information about what *did* matter to these students and their instructors. The remainder of this chapter explains these findings.

Student Nominations

In this section I present a synopsis of descriptive data I gathered from the first phase of my study. Students completed a questionnaire in which I asked students to nominate instructors who they believe supported their academic success. This study focused on students from historically underrepresented populations – first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color – who experienced academic struggle. Table 9 illustrates how students self-identified with one or more of these identities.

Table 9. Self-Reported Demographics of 21 Questionnaire Participants

Demographic	Count
First-generation student	16
Low-income student	15
Student of Color	16
Two of these	4
Three of these	9

The 21 nominated instructors represented a diverse range of instructor types, disciplinary areas, course levels, course types, modes of delivery, and semester taught. Tables 10 through 12 summarize student nominations in each of these areas. Table 10 highlights the four different types of instructors who were nominated for this study. Table 11 illustrates the wide range of disciplines represented by the nominated instructors. Table 12 outlines more specific details about the courses the students were enrolled in when they were taught by the nominated instructors.

Table 10. Roles of the 21 Nominated Instructors

Instructor Type	Total Nominations
Graduate Teaching Assistant	5
Lecturer or Senior Lecturer	12
Tenure-track or Tenured Faculty	4

Table 11. Disciplinary Area of the 21 Nominated Course Instructors

Disciplinary Area	Specific Departments Represented	Overall Nominations
Humanities	English	5
	Foreign Languages	
Social Sciences	Anthropology	4
	Economics	
	Psychology	
STEM	Anatomy	12
	Chemistry	
	City and Regional Planning	
	Computer Science Engineering	
	Engineering (non-specific)	
	Environment and Natural Resources	
	Food Science and Technology	
	Math	
	Statistics	

Table 12. Characteristics of Courses Taught by the 21 Nominated Instructors

Characteristic	Total Nominations
Course Level	
1000	10
2000	5
3000	4
4000	1
5000	1
Course Type	
General Education course	9
Not a General Education course	12
Mode of Delivery	
Fully in-person	7
Hybrid	10
Online asynchronous	3
Online synchronous	1
Semester Taught	
Summer 2019	1
Autumn 2019	1
Spring 2020	2
Autumn 2020	2
Spring 2021	3
Autumn 2021	12

I now share the results of my thematic data analysis. These results are organized into the main sections of student perspectives, which answer research questions one and two, and instructor perspectives, which address research questions three and four.

Student Perspectives

The second phase of my study focused on student perspectives of the instructors who supported them. All of the findings in this section were generated from both the open-ended qualitative results from the questionnaire (phase one) and student interviews

(phase two). Table 13 summarizes the demographics of the interview participants. I did not assign pseudonyms to students, nor create student profiles, as the phenomenon of study was the instructors' actions, not the students.

Table 13. Self-Reported Demographics of 14 Student Interviewees

Demographic	Count
First-generation student	11
Low-income student	9
Student of Color	9
Two of these	3
Three of these	6

I now explore the key findings from students' perspectives.

Understanding Success and Struggle

The first research question asked, how do historically underrepresented students understand academic success and struggle? Student responses fell into one of three themes: Performance Measures, Developing a Growth Mindset, and Integrating Knowledge. Table 14 provides a summary of these themes.

Table 14. Themes of Academic Success and Struggle from Students' Perspectives

Theme	Definition	Examples of Success	Examples of Struggle
Performance Measures	Measurable outcomes of academic success or struggle	• Earns high enough GPA to maintain scholarship • Accepted into desired major • Achieves desired goal (often B+/3.0 average or higher) • Earns grades that reflect understanding of concepts	• Is placed on academic probation • Completes courses with Cs or lower • Withdraws from courses • Earns grades that are not personally satisfactory • Believes more effort could have been given
Developing a Growth Mindset	"Learning new things through different challenges and situations and growing from them"	• Demonstrates excitement for coming to class • Shows curiosity and interest in what they are learning • Perseveres • Maintains overall well-being	• Does not know whether the choice of major/career is right for them • Lacks motivation • Unable/unwilling to give full ability
Integrating Knowledge	Developing a thorough understanding of material and demonstrating commitment to learning	• Gains true understanding of material • Progresses to the next level • Uses knowledge and material in life outside the classroom	• Struggles to understand concepts • Unable to immerse oneself in the material • Unable to retain/apply information once the class is over • Irregular or no attendance

I now share in greater detail the meaning of these themes and provide direct examples from both the questionnaire and interview data to justify their creation.

Performance Measures

The first theme, Performance Measures, was unsurprising. These are the measurable outcomes of academic success or struggle. Grades are perhaps the most common measure of whether a student is successful, with a low grade indicating struggle and a high grade indicating achievement. The findings made clear that the "grades" standard of success and struggle looks different for each student. Not all students want to earn a 4.0 GPA. "It isn't necessarily about having a 4.0 or being top of the class," one student wrote in their questionnaire response. In fact, a 3.0 cumulative GPA or a B+ average were the most commonly cited standards of success. Other students were focused on the specific value needed to get into their major (e.g., 2.5 GPA) or to keep their scholarship (e.g., 3.2 GPA). Some students were simply focused on making it through the course. For example, three students in two different STEM disciplines reported the goal of earning the minimum grade (C-) that would allow them to advance to the next course in the series and continue in their major.

While one might anticipate that students would mention specific letter grades or GPA values, some students also shared a broader view of grades. One student wrote that academic success means "having an understanding of concepts and being able to show that in grades." Similarly, a student wrote that "Academic success is being proud of the work I have put in and being comfortable with where I stand in the course." Another emphasized that while earning high marks was great, it was important to develop an "understanding that grades don't define you or your intelligence." Grades, then, were a measure of success that could manifest in different ways.

Grades were also the most commonly mentioned illustration of student academic struggle. Specific examples include a GPA that places a student on academic probation (2.0) or completing courses with a grade of C- or lower. Struggle also manifested in withdrawing from courses. Both a low GPA and multiple course withdrawals can lead to failure to achieve satisfactory academic progress (SAP), which impacts a student's financial aid eligibility. Thus, one student defined academic struggle as "having an unsatisfactory SAP rating." Other students defined academic struggle in more subjective terms, including not "having grades the student feels [are] satisfactory and up to their standards given their amount of work and effort given." While grades were the most cited measure of success and struggle, students had many other definitions. As one student summarized, "grades are a small piece of the puzzle."

Developing a Growth Mindset

The data also yielded a second theme, Developing a Growth Mindset. The theme of Growth Mindset captures ideas around engagement, perseverance, effort, and motivation. The definition of this theme is "learning new things through different challenges and situations and growing from them," as one student wrote in their questionnaire response. The theme of Growth Mindset also incorporates putting in consistent effort even when a class became difficult and trying to ask for help even when doing so is uncomfortable.

Overall well-being was also an important component of the Growth Mindset theme. One student wrote that success "also means that I manage other facets of my life (e.g., finances, mental/emotional wellbeing) in such a way that they contribute to my

116

academic success." Another mentioned "reaching your personal goals and being able to do it in a way that is not detrimental to your overall health (physical, mental, social, etc.) [sic]." Other examples of academic success tied to well-being included steady class attendance, positive mental health, and being willing to admit when you are struggling. It also includes "having inner peace knowing you're on the right path," as one student wrote.

In comparison, struggle reflected the inability to adopt a Growth Mindset. Indicators of this included lacking motivation, poor attendance, and being unable/unwilling to give their best effort to a course. "I wasn't the best with attendance," one student admitted to me. Another added, "in college, you can't miss two or three days." Academic struggle also manifested as low self-worth and self-efficacy. One student described her poor academic performance in her first year. "I struggled with self-esteem and with confidence in my intelligence," she explained in her interview. "I just really doubted my ability to be successful as a college student… and I doubted my intellect." These doubts can lead a student to question whether their courses and major are right for them – or whether college is even right for them. Taken together, these ideas indicate just how important a Growth Mindset is to a student's academic success.

Integrating Knowledge

Integrating Knowledge was the third theme encapsulating success and struggle. This theme is defined as developing a thorough understanding of material and demonstrating a commitment to learning. To the student participants, learning captured more than just grades. It also included gaining a true understanding of the material with

117

the ultimate goal of applying it or using it in the future. "Academic success also involves immersing oneself in the material and effectively using it in one's life outside the classroom," one student wrote. Another described the workload of a class as "extensive," but went on to say "it gave me a true understanding of the material. So that I wasn't just doing the work, but I was learning important ideas to help me in my major." For this student, academic success meant mastering difficult concepts that would help her progress to the next level. Additional definitions of success included participating in their own learning, developing new skills, and referring to what they learned when participating in job interviews, all of which indicated engagement with learning.

Students also identified learning-related markers of struggle. The most common example was difficulty understanding material. Students mentioned that frustration about learning can lead them to quit trying, stop showing up, withdraw from the course, or outright fail. Another marker of academic struggle is the thought of dropping out of college. One student described in her interview how she was having difficulty with her learning in two of her classes that semester and she "almost dropped out of college, [I] was really, really close to it. Even though I had straight A's in high school… and I know college is different of course, but I didn't expect it to go that bad." The more she struggled, the less she was able to retain information, leading her to perform increasingly worse in these classes. The other key learning-related marker of struggle was disinterest in trying, which could manifest as lacking excitement for learning, failing to meet deadlines, or not putting in the effort one is capable of giving. Overall, some of the indicators of success and struggle are easy to identify, while others are more internal to

118

the student. In particular, unless the student voices their learning struggles, they may not receive the help they need to improve.

The student participants in this study presented varied and nuanced views of academic success and struggle. One student's qualitative questionnaire response stood out because it captured all of the key themes:

True academic success doesn't have to just look good, but feel good as well! Before finding something I was passionate about, I was simply just going through the motions… I finally allowed myself to benefit from my learning rather than attempting to mimic and portray what I thought academic success should look like. Academic success, to me, is being able to get the most out of your education while being able to give your best. The tangible success and good grades will eventually follow, but do not ultimately define academic success!

With a clearer picture of how students understand academic success and struggle, I now turn to their understandings of how instructors support their success.

Identifying Supportive Instructors

My second research question asked, how do historically underrepresented students identify instructors who they believe support their academic success? Responses tended to focus on either dispositions or behaviors, and both were essential for students to feel supported. Several themes emerged from the data. These themes are organized in Table 15. I used in vivo codes from the findings to describe each theme (Saldaña, 2021).

119

Table 15. Students' Views of How Instructors Support Their Academic Success

Theme (In Vivo Code)	Definition	Examples of Dispositions	Examples of Behaviors
Creates More Motivation for Me	Creating conditions that build student motivation	• Encouraging • Supportive • Reassuring	• Goes above and beyond • Has high expectations • Wants students to succeed • Puts in clear effort
Puts the Joy into Learning	Infusing teaching with personality; makes learning interesting	• Enthusiastic • Sense of humor • Personable • Passionate	• Interacts with students • Shows up as "real" or authentic
Didn't Make You Feel Dumb	Respecting students even when they struggle	• Approachable • Non-judgmental • Not condescending • Patient	• Acknowledges and corrects own mistakes • Makes themselves available • Responds to student messages
Not Here to Hurt Your Grades	Challenging and supporting students	• Flexible • Accommodating • Helpful	• Gives a second chance • Offers challenging curriculum with help when needed • Accessible
Made Material Understandable	Working to convey material so it makes sense to students	• Communicative • Clear • Engaging	• Remains open to questions • Gives feedback • Makes accommodation for student learning
Treats Us as More Than Just Students	Viewing students as autonomous adults with lives beyond the classroom	• Concerned • Friendly • Caring	• Engages topics not related to class • Acknowledges the whole student • Makes personal connection
If I Ever Needed Anything	Supporting young adults still figuring things out	• Genuine • Interested • Welcoming	• Says "I'm here for you" • Reaches out proactively • Knows resources

I now describe each of these themes in greater detail and provide evidence from the questionnaire and interview data.

Creates More Motivation for Me

This theme refers to creating conditions that build student motivation. Students indicated that instructors' actions and dispositions helped with this process. An instructor's reassuring attitude and supportive feedback made a difference for student motivation to keep trying. One student said of her statistics instructor:

> The positive reassurance and support… it just really makes a difference, and to know that there are people who want to see you do good, it helps with that motivational aspect. And honestly it makes me care more because to see her saying like "Oh, I'm proud. You're doing great. Keep going, you got this," left me like, I don't want to not turn in the assignment, she's proud, I got to keep her proud, give her a reason to be proud.

Instructor encouragement eventually led some students to find intrinsic motivation.

Additionally, several students were extrinsically motivated by the high expectations their instructors set for them. One student asked her math instructor for an exam study guide, but he refused to give her one. She recalled him saying "Nope, no, not going to give you that," which she said made her "learn the material a little bit more because you weren't exactly sure what kind of questions are going to be on the exam." The instructor communicated that he would be available for help, but he believed his students could do this on their own. This provided the student with the motivation she needed to study. Another student made a similar comment about her chemistry professor,

stating "He made me actually kind of [think], it's not too bad. It's bearable and you could actually do it." This is another example of raising student motivation by taking simple steps to increase their self-efficacy through feedback, encouragement, and setting high expectations.

Students were also quick to note the instructors who were willing to go above and beyond to promote student learning. Instructors giving effort beyond what the students' perceived as required demonstrated support for their success. Examples of going above and beyond included making an effort to learn students' names in a large course section, accommodating students' schedules and arranging a time to meet on the weekend, or just spending extra time preparing course materials. Speaking about her chemistry professor, one student told me, "His practice exams would have a video associated with them. I feel like he put a lot of work into making sure we had a structure and it was easy to follow." More than one student commented on their instructor's willingness to meet outside of standard working hours. This example was provided about a math instructor:

> And then he's like, "It's easier to schedule in the evening because that's when I have free time and it could just be you and I going over your exam." So that following Wednesday is when we met at 7:00 p.m. to go over the exam and he spent two hours. I'm like, dang, you don't have to eat dinner or anything? But it was really nice to know that somebody actually cared to spend two hours to go over it.

A final example of going above and beyond came from a student with a sensory disorder, who was feeling overwhelmed in a lab situation where there were many triggers

impacting her anxiety and ability to process. The graduate TA she nominated put in extra effort to make sure the class was inclusive:

> This TA helped by casually checking in with my group throughout the lab and helping "translate" what I wanted to say to my group whenever I struggled to communicate. When I couldn't find a tutor, she offered to work with me one-to-one during office hours so that I could follow along with my lab partners and not feel as embarrassed.

Each of these examples demonstrated that the instructor put clear effort into teaching, which seemed to result in increased student motivation.

Puts the Joy into Learning

This theme is defined as infusing teaching with personality and making learning interesting. Students nominated instructors they felt brought passion, enthusiasm, and humor to the classroom. For example, students highlighted how some instructors were personable and brought a (usually quirky) sense of humor to their teaching. Students also appreciated instructors who were unafraid to be themselves. "She has an actual personality," one student wrote. Another described an instructor this way:

> He loved coffee, so every day he would come in with a coffee mug and he'd wear the same outfit every day. It was so funny and he's 28 years old, but he acted an old dude [sic]. And he would be writing on the chalkboard with the chalk and sipping his coffee at the same time.

Another student described the joy her math instructor brought to the classroom

He was also very funny because when he really liked something that he was

teaching, he would teach it really fast and be like, 'Oh my gosh, I need to slow

down.' You could tell that he was very passionate about what he was doing.

Instructors who brought authenticity to their work inspired their students to enjoy the

learning process.

The outcomes of joyful learning were significant. One student described retaking

calculus after failing it her first year, and the difference the instructors made for her:

"They made me actually like calc[ulus], and I'm not a calc person … So after I took that

class, I was like, 'I would actually retake this class.' It was that enjoyable for me."

Through modeling enthusiasm, her instructor helped her move from a place of fear to a

place of curiosity and interest, which enabled her to retain material and earn a higher

grade. A different student was so inspired by her instructor's passion and enthusiasm that

it led her to consider a completely different career path. This student had been struggling

to set a career goal until she met this instructor. "I actually sent him an email at the end of

the semester, thanking him and whatnot," she told me, because she ended up landing an

internship in that new field. "It just feels really good to finally, I think, find where I

belong potentially," she told me. By infusing their teaching with joy for learning,

instructors helped students overcome the negative images they had of college and their

overall academic performance. They helped students re-envision the classroom as a place

where positive, fun things could happen, rather than the classroom serving as a reminder

of their struggles.

Didn't Make You Feel Dumb

This theme is defined as respecting students even when they struggle. To explain this theme, I start by giving an example of the opposite. In my interviews, I asked students to explain some of the ways in which their nominated instructors were similar to, or different from, other instructors at Ohio State. This evoked strong reactions from students about other instructors they perceive as condescending. Over half of the students had a story of a condescending instructor, someone who viewed the student with disdain or contempt if the student did not achieve their learning goals. One student told me:

> I've had a couple of professors straight up tell me the first day that they're here to research and that teaching is their side thing. I don't want to say that they have a superiority complex per se, but some professors aren't the easiest to approach.

A different student described a condescending professor as one who, "when you actually ask them for help, they don't give it, because they're like 'oh, why didn't you watch the lecture? Blah, blah, blah." Another student described condescending professors in this way: "When you do approach them it's like they're rude or they make you feel dumb, like you should already know this stuff, or… you still don't get it so you're just an idiot." An experience with a condescending professor led one participant to sit in on lectures of the same course given by a different instructor in order to learn the topic in an environment where she felt respected. A STEM student went so far as to say:

> I feel like that's why college students are stressed out and they're [saying] 'I'm going to drop out,' … because of these instructors. It feels like they don't care about you. And I don't know if they're here for a paycheck or research or whatnot, but that's oftentimes how it feels.

125

When a student had an interaction with this type of instructor, they felt their intelligence was being called into question.

In comparison, students had the opposite experience with the instructors they nominated who supported their academic success. "Some professors say ask questions, and then they get mad when you do. But he was definitely not like that. He was always ready to help you," one student said of her math instructor. Students picked up on who was interested in helping them learn versus those instructors who seemed to just assume they would figure it out [on their own]. One student said:

> It's the way that they talk to you… instead of, it's like, "Oh, just do this and turn it in." It's like, "Well, this is how you do it." They explain, they make sure that you understand it. She would never just send me off [saying] "Read the syllabus and then you should be able to comprehend it."

Students believed the instructors they nominated actually wanted to teach, in comparison to other instructors they have encountered at the university.

It was also important for students to feel like they were respected. Multiple students described how the instructors they nominated treated them with respect and conveyed the message that all students could learn. One student put it this way: "Typically in a classroom setting, as I said, there's a power difference, and they're the ones that are trying to teach you to be successful. But [instructor] was more so relating rather than showing me how to properly succeed." Another student gave an anecdote from his first year, when he needed to ask for some leeway on a paper. The paper was supposed to be 12-15 pages long, but the student had only written eight pages. The

126

student was terrified the instructor might treat him with disdain, as other instructors had done. His experience ended up being the opposite of what he expected:

> Little first year college student just being like, I don't know what I'm doing. The professor, [I'm] scared they might be mean. Then this dude's just like, "Okay. Yeah, you can turn in your eight-page paper, that's okay," and I'm like, what?

The student was completely surprised, yet grateful that he received an understanding and respectful response.

Three students specifically referenced the fact that their nominated instructors did not question their intelligence and in fact helped students to realize their own ability. A student gave this example from their math class: "They made me realize that I'm not dumb, I just had to take my time with it and really put in the effort and go to office hours and get all my questions asked." The other two students explained that they did not ask questions for fear of appearing dumb, until their instructors made it clear that all questions were welcome, even if those questions had been asked before. This created the sense that students were in a non-judgmental space where it was okay to make mistakes while learning.

Lastly, students appreciated instructors who brought a bit of humility to the classroom, who were willing to admit when they made a mistake. "She's the first one to own her mistakes and acknowledge that she's not perfect. And then it makes us as students feel more comfortable coming to her when we might not know the answer," one student said. For another student, the instructor's humility and openness stood out to him as unique compared to other instructors at Ohio State. "He would say, 'If you see

127

something I did wrong, correct me.' He was [wrong] on a couple of occasions. He was happy to correct himself," the student told me. Overall, students found that instructors are also learning as they go, which conveyed the message that struggle and confusion were natural parts of the learning process and did not mean a student was not intelligent or not capable of learning.

Not Here to Hurt Your Grades

This in vivo theme came from a student whose professor in a STEM class said, "I am here to help you. I'm not here to hurt your grades." This theme does not suggest that instructors were unwilling to give students a low grade if they earned it. Rather, it reflects concern for overall student learning. This theme is defined as a balance between challenging and supporting students. This theme builds on the idea that an instructor wants to help students learn, not deliberately cause them problems or hold them back. The first way this theme manifested was through the notion of second chances. A few students spoke of instructors who let them redo assignments or submit make-up work. One student had messed up significantly on an exam in the midst of a mental health crisis:

> I think our second midterm, I was just not in a good place mentally. And so, I did not watch any of the lectures and I just couldn't get out of bed or go to class. I wrote on my midterm, "I don't know any of the content, I just couldn't," and I just wrote a little excerpt about that. He reached out to me and was like, "Please reach out to me to schedule a Zoom meeting. I want to talk about this. I don't

want you to fail this class or fall behind"… he let me do corrections on the [exam]

for up to 100%.

Another student pointed out that getting points back was useful not just in terms of raising a grade. The opportunity to redo work "was really helpful because not only did it help people earn points back, it also forced them to look at concepts they missed," she told me. In other words, a second chance not only boosted a student's grade, but it also built confidence and reinforced learning.

This theme also encompasses the idea of learning for learning's sake. A student gushed about their experience in a psychology class and how the low stakes grading freed them up to think more critically about the material rather than focus on getting things right. They said, "There's literally very, very low chances of someone getting a bad grade. It's mostly just like showing up and participating and really being immersed in what you're talking about." Another student talked about his economics professor who would tell the class that he wanted them to really learn:

So a lot of the exams, he would give us hard questions, but then really easy

questions, just to see where we were at, because I think he was just truly about

learning. Not really like giving out stress, but just all about learning.

These instructors conveyed the idea that education is more than just earning a specific grade.

Lastly, this theme captures how some instructors were willing to adjust the pace of their course and spend more time reviewing the topics that seemed to trip students up. One student talked about how their statistics instructor pushed an important deadline back

once it became clear students were not understanding the material: "She gave us that extra week to slow down, learn the information, so that when finals came around, we didn't just shove it in one ear, out the other type of thing. She gives us time to learn it." This was another example of an instructor strategy that sent students the message that their learning process and overall growth were as equally important as mastering specific objective standards (i.e., grades).

Made Material Understandable

Making material understandable means to actively work to convey material in a way that makes sense to students. I asked students to explain what was happening in a course that contributed to their success or struggle. Several students referenced struggling to understand and remember content, particularly in STEM classes. Students specifically mentioned struggling with classes like chemistry, physics, or calculus, which have a reputation for being "weed-out" courses, meaning high-enrollment courses where many students earn low grades. Students perceive that departments intentionally make these courses difficult. Yet a number of students ended up nominating an instructor from STEM areas – primarily because that instructor made the material understandable. In a questionnaire response, one student wrote, "He made it easy to understand hard conceptual questions and if I didn't understand something, he would thoroughly explain it in multiple ways." Another important factor for students was whether the instructor would clarify why the student got something wrong. When an instructor took the time to explain why a particular answer was right or wrong, students said they developed a greater grasp on the material.

Students were not unwilling to take challenging classes, but they had the best experiences in classes where their instructor was clear and effective. "She helped me whenever I needed it, but she also challenged me and pushed me to think for myself so I could be successful in the course," one student wrote in the questionnaire. In an interview, a different student discussed her chemistry course and how she felt motivated to persist because the instructor made the material understandable:

> Even though I got a bad grade, I was still working on it every day, just because I enjoyed attending his lectures and things like that… I noticed the time and effort I was putting [in] corresponded to the type of teacher I had.

Students were also able to improve their understanding through reviewing instructor feedback. In response to the questionnaire, one student wrote about how feedback left on his submissions was especially helpful:

> The professor always made a point to give constructive comments. In most of my other classes I barely ever hear from professors or what they think of my work… This professor sometimes wrote pages analyzing my work. I would often reply to their comments because I was so excited they wanted to talk about my work.

Receiving feedback also helped students feel like they belonged in the course. One student spoke of feeling like she didn't matter at the university until she began to get encouraging instructor feedback. Feedback served as another mechanism for making material understandable.

Another way instructors Made Material Understandable to students was through connecting material to students' lives. This cognitive strategy helps students comprehend

131

and retain information. This seemed to be especially important in classes that students perceived as difficult. One student who was taking an upper-level economics class reported that the relevant examples made all the difference in his ability to understand course material. "We would cover material… from a very broad range. Like [the instructor] said, 'This is real world economics.' He said he really wanted to emphasize discussing what we learned and applying it to real world situations." To this student, it seemed like the instructor understood this was a difficult course and wanted to be proactive in helping students learn.

The other most common way instructors Made Material Understandable was by frequently checking for student understanding. Multiple students spoke or wrote about how their instructors would make frequent knowledge checks throughout a class session. A student who nominated an English instructor gave this perfect example:

> If we had any issues in class or if anyone had anything they were confused about, he would purposely stop up [sic] and make sure they were understanding what was going on. That way everyone was on the same track, because more than likely if one student was confused about something, someone else would be too.

Students tended to view these knowledge checks as an indicator that their instructor truly wanted them to learn. Making the material understandable helped them rise to the challenge of mastering difficult classes.

Treats Us as More Than Just Students

Another theme that emerged from the data centered around the notion that instructors viewed students as more than just warm bodies in the classroom. This theme,

132

Treats Us as More Than Just Students, is defined as viewing students as autonomous adults with lives beyond the classroom. In other words, students appreciated when their instructor acknowledged that they were a whole person. This seemed to set them apart from other instructors at the university. "Not everyone takes the time to understand outside factors that could be affecting your work or your attitudes or your spirits and stuff like that," said one student. Another student had a close family member pass away near the end of the term. She was grateful for her instructor's willingness to accommodate her. She told me, "So when I had to take my final, the final was actually on the day of the funeral, which he allowed me to take it the next day with a different class." She appreciated that the instructor recognized the significance of this life event and was willing to give her a little grace.

Interestingly, students in both small and large classes reported this idea of being seen as a whole person. One might expect that it would be easier for instructors to interact this way in a smaller classroom where they have an opportunity to get to know students a little better. However, three students explained that their instructors were able to convey this care for the whole person even in very large class settings. One student wrote:

Despite having hundreds of students, she makes a point to acknowledge we are all uniquely human and that different things affect people differently! This ultimately helped in my academic success because I am able to recognize that in order to give my best, I need to sometimes put myself first and make a point to take care of myself.

133

Instructors who adopted this whole-student mindset were also willing to engage students on topics other than course content. "I feel like she actually wanted to make genuine connections with us. We also had time to just talk about life and stuff after class," a student wrote. Students described various other ways instructors connected to them on a personal level, ranging from sharing stories about their own mental health struggles to giving out Halloween candy. Some students also discussed how instructors shared a little bit from their own personal lives. For example, a student said this about their instructor:

> He had, I guess, more respect than other professors about work and life balance. I think he knew a lot about that because his wife was pregnant and actually gave birth during the semester. So he was gone for a little bit. So I guess he really knew about how important it was to be with your own family.

This personal connection and acknowledgement of the whole student left participants feeling like they were valued. For some students, this made significant difference for their academic success.

If I Ever Needed Anything

One of the most common findings was the idea that instructors were available, accessible, and willing to provide academic support for students whenever they needed it. This is encapsulated in the idea of If I Ever Needed Anything. While the previous theme, Treats Us as More Than Just Students, emphasizes recognizing students as adults who have autonomy, If I Ever Needed Anything entails providing support to students as young adults who are still figuring things out. Some students in the study did take advantage of this help. Others did not need much help but felt like they could ask for it in the future,

and that meant a lot to them. According to the students, instructors communicated this sense of care in multiple ways, such as through email or messages on the learning management platform (Carmen), verbally at the start of class, or through feedback on individual assignments.

Perhaps most importantly, instructors conducted proactive messaging to convey this support. One student gave this example from her online class instructor, who reached out to students before the semester officially started:

> She prefaced before class even started just, "Hey, I know this is going to be a weird start to the year, things are different, they're always changing, but I'm here for you. I want you to do the best and if any problems come along, I'm here for you."

That instructor went on to send an email at the start of each week that included both course content updates and messages of encouragement. A student in a lab class discussed how during each lab session, the instructor would "have a conversation with every person at the table and make sure we were comfortable or [ask] what he can do?" Another student described how her instructor would tell the class, "I just hope throughout everything that you know this is not a journey you are expected to complete on your own. Please remember we are here to help you." This type of proactive outreach was important to students as several of them described how personally challenging it could be to ask for help. "I hate asking for help… that's my weakness," one student said. They added, "I think it's good when an instructor can realize, oh this student needs help." Additionally, two students described how their instructors normalized asking for help by talking about

135

struggles they had as students. The sense that an instructor was open and accessible encouraged help-seeking behavior.

Three students gave examples of their instructors checking up on their personal well-being, as the instructors seemed to understand that this impacted academic success. One of these students described how his computer science professor followed up with him when she noticed he had been absent from class:

> She would always email me after. She would always ask, "Hey, are you okay? Let me know how you're doing and if you need help catching up on the material because I'm always here." That made me happy to see that she cared about my wellbeing and how I was doing.

In a questionnaire response, another student wrote, "Perhaps most importantly, he seemed to genuinely care about me and my classmates. I felt as though he wanted to see us thrive. I think he did a lot to ensure that happened." Some instructors promoted student well-being and academic success by connecting them to campus resources ranging from tutoring to mental health counseling.

Not all students needed the help offered by their instructors, but they still appreciated knowing it was available to them. "I feel like if I was struggling later on that I could definitely reach out to him," one student said. Another stated that while she did not need to take advantage of the resources the instructor offered to her, "I feel like I could approach him about any situation... he told us that the first day, that if we had anything going on just to let him know and he would help us." This idea that instructors were waiting in the wings left students feeling more comfortable and confident.

136

These actions of care had a direct positive impact on students. For some, their encounter with the nominated instructor was the first real sense of caring they had experienced at Ohio State. In both the questionnaire and in interviews, students described feeling like a number at the university, until they interacted with this instructor. In an interview, one student described how a specific encounter with an instructor had been her most meaningful interaction at the university to date:

> I remember as soon as he said bye and started walking the other way, after we had left the building, I called my friend. I was like, "Whoa, you would not believe the experience I just had." I was almost emotional about it, just because being at OSU, I have not once connected to anyone really like that. I mean I've had friends but not professors.

This student went on to explain how she thought her instructor's caring investment in her success was the only reason she stayed enrolled that semester. While her example was perhaps the most pronounced, she was not alone in describing the benefits of an instructor's caring approach. "I really felt they cared about my academic success and that I was not just a number, which can be hard thing to do at a large school," one student wrote in their questionnaire response.

These seven themes capture the students' ideas about how instructors supported their academic success. The themes reflect both instructor dispositions and behaviors. I now provide a short summary and a list of outcomes.

Summary and Outcomes

Students reported academic success outcomes that correlated to the actions of the instructors they nominated, as outlined in Table 16.

Table 16. Academic Outcomes Achieved Due to the Support of Instructors

Students' Reported Academic Outcomes	
Able to apply material in the future	Identifying a major that is the right fit
Able to bounce back from failure	Higher grade earned in repeated course
Active engagement in class	Learning to communicate their needs
Comprehending the material	Learning how to ask for help effectively
Developing better study habits	Passing a course they expected to fail
Earning their goal grade	Producing quality work reflecting potential
Greater academic confidence	Securing internships and career opportunities

These outcomes overlap with the ways in which students understand academic success and struggle. An instructor who supports their academic success is someone who helps them develop their own definition of success, proactively guides them through the learning process, and gives them tools to overcome struggle. These instructors care about their own teaching and about students' learning and they enact that care in visible ways. Sometimes students can identify these instructors from the first day of class. "I feel like you can tell from really early on the type of person a professor is by the way they teach and the way they interact with questions and stuff," said one student in an interview. Another provided this succinct summary: "You can care, but if you don't show that to your students, then they're never going to know." In the next section, I highlight how the instructor participants in my study conveyed this type of support to their students.

<center>**Instructor Perspectives**</center>

The third phase of my study focused on gathering data from instructors'

viewpoints. As a reminder, although 25 instructors were nominated, I only invited 21

instructors to participate in phase three, because four of the nominations came from

students who did not share any of the identities that are the focus of my study. Of the 21

instructors invited to participate in interviews and observations, six agreed. Table 17

provides a summary of demographic information about these six instructors. Each of

these instructors taught courses at multiple levels. Thus, in Table 17, the column "course

level" refers to the course the student nominator was enrolled in.

Table 17. Demographics of Six Instructor Participants

Name	Instructor Type	Disciplinary Area	Course Level	Demographics
Alexis	Graduate TA	Humanities	3000	Black male
Ben	Graduate TA	STEM	2000	White male
Chase	Lecturer	Social Science	3000	White male
Donna	Lecturer	STEM	2000	White female
Elijah	Lecturer	Social Science	4000	White male
Heather	Tenured Faculty	Social Science	1000	White female

Before answering research questions three and four, I provide a profile for each of the

instructor participants. Each profile contains an in vivo code that best captures the

instructor's approach to teaching.

Alexis: "No Judgement in My Classroom"

Alexis is a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Ph.D. student in a humanities

department. He teaches his own sections of foreign language courses. Unlike any of the

<center>139</center>

other instructor participants, Alexis shares all three identities under focus in this study (i.e., first-generation, low-income, and Student of Color). Prior to coming to Ohio State, Alexis taught foreign languages in educational settings outside of the United States. Alexis's teaching philosophy is encompassed by one of his classroom rules, which is "no judgment in my classroom." As a foreign language teacher, he recognizes students can be anxious about this learning and wants to create a stress-free environment. He shared with me:

> The first rule I tell them is, hey, in this class, it's judgment-free. So you do not have to stress… No one is going to laugh at you. That's forbidden in this class. I won't tolerate any discrimination, any judging of people.

As evidenced by this quote, Alexis cares greatly about creating a supportive space for students to learn.

The student who nominated Alexis said his passion for the subject matter was contagious. She appreciated his individualized approach to teaching and found him to be approachable and supportive. The student told me:

> He is very accommodating in terms of mental health and deadlines but still maintains high standards of excellence in the classroom. He always made time for us. When I have tendencies to slip back into my old ways or if I'm not motivated or need help, he treated me like a real person and an adult, which I'm so appreciative of.

The student also remarked on how the class was difficult for her, but she did not mind. "He caters to people with the highest work ethic and pushes the whole group forward,"

she said. Alexis inspired her in ways she never expected, saying "Second language acquisition is my passion and to see someone be so committed is inspiring. He's one of the reasons I'm never giving up on this language!"

Ben: "Meet Them Where They Are"

Ben is a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Ph.D. candidate in a STEM department. He is responsible for leading the lab sections of courses. These courses are typically taken by students in biological or health sciences. Ben has taught at the college level for nine years. According to Ben, he brings an unusual perspective to his department in that he truly enjoys teaching and wants to pursue it as the focus of his future faculty career. Ben's teaching philosophy can be summed up by the phrase, "meet them where they are." He uses phrases like "We're here for you" and "We'll meet you where you are" when he teaches. Ben feels responsible for making learning accessible and relevant to students.

The student who nominated Ben described his approach on the first day of class: "He was like, 'I'm here to help you guys.' And for me… I feel like that's what I've been kind of lacking. Not necessarily individual attention, but a teacher that's initially like,' I am here to help you.'" The student described Ben as proactive, approachable, engaging, and interested. She felt comfortable asking him questions, and particularly liked that he was constantly asking "What could I do to help you? Is there anything else I can help with?" The student acknowledged that while the class section was large and it was impossible for Ben to get to know every student, she still had the impression that he was giving her personal attention and that he cared. More importantly, the student was grateful that Ben "tried to change it up a little bit and be like, 'Look at it from this

perspective now, if you're not getting it from this one.'" His persistence in trying to explain a topic led her to eventually grasp the content. She eventually finished the course with a grade of C, which was higher than she had anticipated. She credited Ben's determination to make the material understandable.

Chase: "Bring Humanism into Teaching"

Chase is a lecturer in a social science department. who teaches courses that are taken primarily by social science majors. According to Chase, his teaching is unique because he incorporates elements of humanism, social justice, and storytelling. Chase described his department's teaching culture as lecture-dominant and disinterested in the student experience. He actively tries to work against this with each lesson he teaches.

Chase's nominator picked up his class at the last minute in order to have enough credit hours to maintain full-time status. Classes that counted toward her degree progress were full, so she needed to choose an elective. The student chose Chase's course based on the title alone. It ended up being her favorite course at the university so far. She described how Chase supported her success from the beginning:

On the first day I went to his class, I went up to him and asked him about all the work I needed to catch up on because it was really late when I joined. He said anything I missed, I could just watch from the lectures he had already recorded.

He also allowed her to make up any missing assignments without penalty. This meant a lot to her because it gave her the same opportunity for a solid start as the rest of the students in the class. The student described Chase as encouraging, friendly, enthusiastic, approachable, and organized. "He never made you feel like you were stupid for asking a

142

question," she said. "It's more rare to have a professor like that." She also appreciated that he was able to give many examples that connected directly to concepts or events that were already familiar to students. She summarized her thoughts about Chase in this way: "I think he's a successful person and I admire successful people, as in he loves his job and he loves what he does. [It] is what I admire about him."

Donna: "Be Kind"

Donna is a lecturer in a STEM department. She began her faculty career at Ohio State after decades of working in a related industry. Donna teaches introductory-level general education and elective courses in multiple delivery modes. At one point her largest online course enrollment was 750 students, although that has since come down to average around 300 students. Her in-person courses tend to enroll around 60 students. Thanks to her industry experience, Donna brings an incredible amount of knowledge of how material covered in the class can connect to practice. Yet, she acknowledges what she calls her "industry bias." She routinely asks students to call her out when she uses too much jargon or if she is speaking above their heads.

Donna's teaching philosophy can be summed up as "be kind." She was given this advice in her first semester, when she approached two colleagues who were popular teachers:

> And I said, "Aside from giving lots of extra credit points, what can I do?" And
> one of them looked at me and said, be kind. I cannot tell you how that has stayed
> with me… I have this picture of [the colleague's] face saying to me, be kind,
> Donna. So I try to be kind and not make assumptions.

143

Even when she feels impatient or frustrated with students, she tries to remember this advice.

The student who nominated Donna was particularly moved by Donna's kindness and willingness to help. The student had an unusually rough semester due to a personal illness, which resulted in her falling behind in her classes. "She was very understanding. I think she was the most understanding out of all my professors," the student said. "She was just basically like, 'I understand. Catch up in all your other classes. Don't worry about my class and we'll get through this.'" The student then met with Donna over Zoom to work out a plan to make up the missing work. "We went through several meetings to break the course down, which made it much easier, and basically just help[ed] me through it piece by piece," she said. The student described Donna as funny, kind, accessible, and understanding. She felt Donna genuinely cared about her as both a student and a person:

> Some professors are strictly about business or whatever, but she would just ask
> me how things are going, how I'm feeling. She's personal… I know she has
> hundreds of students, but it felt like she knew me… she obviously loves her job
> and she cares about her students, basically.

This student told me that Donna was the first instructor she thought actually cared about her.

Elijah: "Be Willing to Help People Out"

Elijah is a senior lecturer in a social science department. He teaches upper-level courses. Elijah's courses are major-specific, meaning he is unlikely to enroll a student

144

who is neither majoring nor minoring in his discipline. Prior to teaching at Ohio State, he had some various other professional experiences, including a stint working with marginalized youth. The phrase Elijah used that best captures his teaching is "be willing to help people out." In Elijah's view, willingness to help is what separates great college teachers from the rest. Helpfulness can also make up for any mistakes or weaknesses because it indicates an instructor's heart is in the right place. "I think even if you're terrible at lecturing and that kind of stuff, that the rest would make up for it, if you're just willing to help people out," he said.

Elijah's nominator was grateful for his efforts to make difficult material attainable. The student was enrolled in one of Elijah's 4000-level classes, a class that included heavy math content. The student was impressed by Elijah's approach to teaching. "He's very proactive. He made sure that we actually understood every assignment we were doing or exam, because I never went into anything surprised… and my results were pretty much what I expected too, each time," the student said. "I felt like he wanted me to succeed and I wanted to succeed. So that was a very good combination." When asked how Elijah impacted his academic success, the student immediately replied:

> Oh, without his office hours, I don't know what I would've done. He was so willing and even when I would come to him after class too. I remember he would always take questions after class… he would always stay behind like 10 minutes… You can get like a mini office hours in. He really tried to help everyone where he could.

145

The student described Elijah as clear, efficient, proactive, and helpful. The student added that Elijah has a reputation for being a good instructor. "I talked to a particular upperclassman who had him, he was telling me, 'You get him for any class you possibly can.'" The student told me he had already scoped out which of Elijah's classes he could take in the future and had written them into his degree plan.

Heather: "Try to Spend My Time on Students"

Heather is a tenured full professor in a social science department. She teaches courses at a variety of levels. As a tenured faculty member, Heather has to balance a professional agenda of teaching, service, and research, with the majority of her time spent on the latter. Heather's teaching philosophy is encompassed by the phrase "try to spend my time on students." This is a direct quote from her interview, where she discussed that she spends less time on formal class preparation and more time on connecting with students and getting feedback. This concept underlines how she builds relationships with students as well as how she promotes their positive behaviors.

The student who nominated Heather ended up in her class because of the topic. "It was something I was interested in as a major," she explained. What immediately stood out to this student was Heather's ability to make students feel comfortable. "Everyone was really comfortable talking about struggles that they have," she observed. "It was a supportive space for people to connect with each other." This was particularly important to the student because it was her first in-person class since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. She felt that Heather helped create a space for students to regain some of their social skills. Additionally, even though the class began at 8:00 a.m., Heather's

captivating teaching motivated students to attend. "It felt like an amazing start to the day for me," her nominator commented. During our interview, the student repeatedly used the adjective "amazing" to describe Heather. She also said Heather was open, personable, honest, and interested in teaching. What stood out to this student the most was Heather's caring approach, stating, "She was just very caring with us and not every professor is like that." The student ended up learning a lot from the course and she attributed much of this to Heather's caring personality and approach to teaching.

These instructor profiles provide important insight into their personalities, professional backgrounds, and teaching philosophies. I now turn to the analysis of data I gathered from these instructors via interviews and observations.

Understanding Success and Struggle

My third research question asked, how do instructors understand academic success and struggle for historically underrepresented students? Instructors' perspectives tended to align with one of three key themes: Productive Behaviors, Attitudes and Outlooks, and Tangible Outcomes. These themes emerged from an integration of interview and observation data. Table 18 summarizes these themes and provides examples. Later in this chapter, Table 20 demonstrates how instructor themes and student themes relate and/or overlap.

Table 18. Instructors' Understandings of Academic Success and Struggle

Theme	Definition	Examples of Success	Examples of Struggle
Productive Behaviors	Particular student actions that indicate and/or contribute to success or struggle	• Participates in class • Learns to ask questions • Uses resources like office hours wisely • Communicates challenges to the instructor	• Does not come to class or is checked out during class • Must ask the same question more than once • Struggles with learning comprehension • Uncommunicative or unresponsive
Attitudes and Outlooks	Short- or long-term attitudes and outlooks that result in observable behavior	• Demonstrates increased confidence • Becomes science-minded • Views general education courses as learning opportunities	• Holds unrealistic expectations about grades • Does not understand the amount of work the course requires • Feels overwhelmed by amount of information
Tangible Outcomes	Operationalized results of learning, incorporating performance measures and integration of knowledge	• Reaches desired grade for the course • Completes the class via incomplete grade if necessary • Can recall material later • Can apply material or skills in post-college life	• Earns low grades • Does not pass and/or needs to repeat a course • Does not apply material to future courses or post-college life

Productive Behaviors

The first theme is Productive Behaviors, or particular student actions that instructors believed indicated and/or contributed to either success or struggle. Some of these results were perhaps not surprising. For example, all instructors agreed that participating in class is a positive behavior that contributes to student success. Both

Heather and Donna referenced students who sit in the front row. In their view, these students were more likely to be paying attention and more likely to ask questions.

Asking questions was also commonly mentioned as a sign of academic success. For these instructors, asking questions indicated engagement with both the material and the learning process. The instructors did not specify that these needed to be well-formed questions, rather, the process of asking contributed to a student's success. To facilitate this, instructors left space for students to ask questions throughout the duration of a class session. They typically tried to prompt students by asking some variation of "What questions do you have?" or by asking students "What does this mean?" or "How would you explain that?" In other words, questioning included checks for understanding as well as attempts to directly engage students with the material. During their respective 80-minute class periods, Alexis asked 81 questions and Heather asked 78 questions. This prompted 58 student responses to Alexis's questions and 48 responses to Heather's questions. Additionally, during the span of 55 minutes, Ben and Chase each asked their classes 21 questions. To further promote this behavior, all three instructors affirmed students' contributions even if a student did not get the answer right. From their perspectives, question-asking indicated a desire to learn.

However, asking the same question more than once could also indicate struggle to comprehend material. Elijah described students who seemed to just ask "the same thing over and over again." Ben told a story of students who asked questions about what he thought to be one of the most basic ideas in the course. "They were struggling, certainly, with that concept," he explained. He went on to say that struggling with a specific

concept can indicate bigger issues with learning comprehension, which in turn can impact a student's overall performance in the course. Overall, question-asking serves as an important signal of both success and struggle.

According to these participants, struggling students are also those who are uncommunicative or unresponsive. This includes not asking questions in class, not responding to instructor outreach, or just generally being checked-out. In contrast, successful students communicate challenges with the instructor. Alexis, Ben, Chase, Donna, and Heather all mentioned examples of students who succeeded because they spoke up about struggles they were facing. These included both academic and personal struggles. When a student spoke up, the instructor connected them with resources or provided flexibility with deadlines. All but Alexis taught classes in large lecture halls, which made it impossible for them to get to know all students on a personal level. Chase explained:

A lot of times it is just waiting for them to get up the gumption in the middle of the night to send me an email or a text or to come up after class and be like, "I'm failing."

Thus, a student might need to speak up if they were experiencing difficulty as the instructors might not otherwise know. The instructors felt this self-advocacy would also serve students down the road.

Another indicator of success was using resources wisely. Examples of this included attending office hours, forming study groups with classmates, or even asking last-minute questions before an exam. Elijah is particularly known for his office hours,

which he enjoys leading because it gives him an opportunity to help students master the course concepts such as managing big data sets. His office hours have such a positive reputation that prior to COVID, there would be a line of students in the hall waiting in the hall to see him – a point confirmed by the student who nominated Elijah. In Elijah's view, successful students are those who use opportunities like office hours to get help and clarify content. Ben and Chase both mentioned students who reach out via email with last-minute questions before an exam are more likely to be successful. They also both said they may or may not see the message and respond, particularly if it is the weekend, but the successful student is the one who at least makes the attempt.

Engagement could also be an indicator of success and struggle. Heather mentioned a few times in her interview that she tries to "watch for patterns," like whether students are coming to class or turning things in on a regular basis. Alexis also gave some descriptors of things he watches for: "Maybe they're not that much attentive in class. They're not participating. Some of the time they skip class. Sometimes even when they come to class, they are in a pensive mood." This behavior could indicate different kinds of struggle, whether failing to comprehend material, poor self-regulated learning, or something in their lives that was preventing them from being able to give their full attention. This seemed to be true even in the classes where the instructor did not take attendance. "There's no grade attached to them attending lab," Ben explained. "But that's going to be the first thing I say next week when they're frustrated with their score. I'm going to say, 'Well didn't you leave halfway through lab last week?'" Each instructor

was able to describe multiple student behaviors that they felt indicated or predicted student success or struggle.

Attitudes and Outlooks

The second theme emerging from the data was the concept of Attitudes and Outlooks. This theme has some overlap with the theme of Developing a Growth Mindset that emerged in the student data. Both relate to growth and motivation. The student theme of Growth Mindset related to an internal sense of perseverance and motivation, while this instructor-driven theme attempted to define students' short- or long-term attitudes and outlooks that resulted in observable behavior. For example, according to instructors, confidence is an indicator of a successful student. Elijah directly spoke of this: "Really good success… [is] seeing the confidence changes and those kinds of things." Confidence manifests as self-efficacy, increased engagement, and a joy of learning. Chase and Heather both described students understanding how material applied to their lives. "The only way to learn information is to apply it to your own life," Heather said, and as students begin to do this, they grow more confident.

Perhaps the opposite of confidence is feeling overwhelmed. A student who is struggling may appear intellectually and/or emotionally exhausted. Ben brought up this point when he told me, "We have students who are overwhelmed. We cover a ton of information, and I don't know that sometimes it's the best." He also said that students do not have a concept of how much work the course requires. Heather commented that feeling overwhelmed can lead to "willful disengagement from class… it gets to a point where I think they just don't want this information. I can't make them take this

152

information." Or, as Alexis described, "I want you to wake up now and start working." Students who do not overcome these feelings or who do not ask for help may end up with low grades. "Unfortunately, those kids have probably withdrawn by then if they're still hanging around," Ben added. He also commented that sometimes feelings of being overwhelmed stem from being overconfident when they first enter the course. "We'll get lots of freshmen, and so it'll be interesting to see, do they think this is like high school?" he said. "Their sense of where they should be is really skewed."

In addition to confidence, an ability to see learning as an opportunity is an indicator of student success. For Donna, her courses serve the purpose of helping students to become science-minded, which she views as an essential skill. Heather also considered critical thinking and excitement for learning to be indicators of success. In her view, a successful student is one who can critically examine evidence. Alexis thought indicators of success included the ability to see the value in learning a foreign language. In contrast, viewing a course as a burden or chore could be an indicator of struggle. This was particularly evident for Donna, who of the six instructors was the only one who taught general education courses: "As a teacher of electives and gen ed stuff, I am not the most important person in that student's life. I'm not in their department." From her view, students do not value her course as much as other courses, which can lead to struggle that manifests as arrogance or an unwillingness to do the work. "There was one who would come in, hold his handout, take the samples, and leave. I thought, well, that's okay, that's on you. You're a senior, I guess you don't care if you get an E." While I did not observe any students walking out of a class, in three of the classroom observations I did notice

students who seemed completely unwilling to engage in discussion and activities. It was impossible for me to infer a reason for this without talking to the students, but it could be interpreted as not valuing the class content. Overall, a student's attitudes towards viewing learning as either an opportunity or a burden can indicate success or struggle, respectively.

An additional sign of struggle emerging from the data was a student's inability to accurately assess their performance and adjust their goals accordingly – a principle of self-regulated learning. Students may aspire to attain a certain GPA or to pursue a certain career yet are unwilling to let go of these goals even when faced with evidence that the goal is not well-suited for their skills and abilities. Ben captured this when he talked about pre-med students, saying "When that student has aspirations, like PT/OT [Physical Therapy/Occupational Therapy] school, where you have to have this GPA… I don't know if it's my place to be like, 'Maybe we should rethink that.'" To be successful, a student must be willing to recognize when they need to adjust their goals. A student's mindset is just as important for their success as their behaviors.

Tangible Outcomes

The final theme that emerged from analysis of instructor data is the idea of Tangible Outcomes, or operationalized, measurable results of learning. This theme encompassed elements of both student themes of Performance Measures and Integrating Knowledge. However, students tended to see Performance Measures and Integrating Knowledge as separate concepts, whereas instructors saw them linked as part of a bigger picture of outcomes.

154

As expected, grades were mentioned as the most common indicator of student success. For Ben, Chase, Elijah, and Heather, exam grades were the most obvious indicator of student success (or struggle). An individual student's pattern of low grades would prompt an instructor to reach out and check in, to see if anything significant was impacting the student's ability to be successful. Sometimes a group of students might earn low grades, which could indicate that an instructor needs to revisit the material or the format of the exam. It could also indicate that the entire group needs to dedicate more time and effort. Ben gave the example of providing some constructive criticism:

> The last couple of times I've given it to the group… I don't think they're ready for their exam that's coming, and so I told them as much. I said, I think you're behind where we should be at this point.

The idea behind his message was to motivate students to put more effort into the course. All six instructors agreed that that a successful grade may look different for every student, depending up on their abilities and goals.

Grades are not the only measure of success. "Students in particular think that success is straight A's and nothing else, but we as instructors often know that there is more than one facet to that," Elijah said. Success could be as straightforward as completing the course, particularly when a student has experienced struggle. Donna gave more than one example of students who utilized the option for an incomplete grade, which enabled them to move from struggle to success.

> Students don't realize they can get an incomplete. They almost never asked for them, but I've offered them and had students go, 'What? I can take an

incomplete?" … I'm like, let's back up and do a reset. Here's what we can do.

You could take an incomplete, you'll have so many weeks to finish. It will be on

you. I won't hold your hand… what I want you to do is give me a schedule. They

commit, they agree to something, they're more likely to succeed. Most of my

incomplete students end up with As. They just needed a break.

Similarly, Alexis recalled a student who was on academic probation and for whom

success was not earning an A, but simply passing the class. "For example, this student,

they just told to me that they wanted to pass. That was the goal, they didn't want to be

kicked out…Even if they don't learn it perfectly, they're still advancing them[selves]

anyway," he said. Measuring success via grades "really depends on the student's goals,"

as Chase concluded.

The last common outcome within this theme was the ability to recall and apply

material later. Alexis spoke of successful students gaining knowledge, saying, "Having

knowledge, that's the primary goal here… When they graduate, they can become

employed, they can get a job." Elijah also talked about students whose grades did not

reflect their eventual positive outcomes. Even though they may not have gotten good test

grades, they still learned material and were able to apply it in the future. "I've had a few

students that weren't good at class, but… got good jobs and things," he said. Chase spoke

of successful students using material to improve their own experiences, saying "I'm

hoping that [students] will walk out of here and they'll know so much more about

themselves and how to be happier and healthier." Unfortunately, sometimes instructors

156

never know whether students are able to use the material in the future unless they encounter the student again.

Summary

Instructors reported varying indicators of success and struggle, which could be grouped into the three themes: Productive Behaviors, Attitudes and Outlooks, and Tangible Outcomes. Some indicators of success and struggle were relatively obvious to instructors, such as grades, class participation, using resources, and communicating challenges. Other indicators were more subtle or internal, such as viewing courses as learning opportunities, becoming science-minded, or maintaining realistic expectations. Additionally, measures of success were relevant to the student. The instructors discussed the fact that not all students want to earn an A; some measure their success by passing the class. A passing grade might look like struggle to an outside observer, but to the student could be the ultimate sign of success.

There was some overlap between student and instructor definitions of success. In addition to grades, both students and instructors viewed understanding and applying the material as markers of success. Both sets of participants also viewed interest in learning as an example of success. Common indicators of struggle included irregular attendance and participation, not comprehending the material, and not knowing whether they were on the right path (remaining committed to an unrealistic plan). Overall, the participants articulated useful ways for identifying success and struggle that go beyond quantitative measures and summative assessments.

Enacting Support for Students

Finally, my fourth research question asked, how do instructors enact academic support for historically underrepresented students? Three key themes emerged from the data. Each theme encompasses several actions that instructors used generally that also offered support to historically underrepresented students. These themes are organized in Table 19 and include: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. I used in vivo codes from the findings to describe each theme.

Table 19. Instructors' Views of How to Support Student Academic Success

Theme	Definition	Examples
Creating a Culture of Learning	Values and practices that guide college students through the learning process while treating them as adults and co-creators of knowledge	• Approaching students proactively • Incorporating humor, passion, enthusiasm • Using relevant examples • Continually connecting to past material • Being accessible and responsive
Demonstrating Care	Actions instructors take to build relationships and create supportive spaces	• Building individual connections • Leaning into specific dispositions • Creating supportive spaces • Stating up front they are there to help • Being invested
Meeting Students Where They Are	An instructional mindset and teaching approach that operationalizes the idea that all students can learn	• Believing that all students can learn • Identifying student needs and then meeting those • Normalizing struggle • Giving second chances

Next, I discuss the meaning of each theme and provide evidence and examples.

Creating a Culture of Learning

The first theme, Creating a Culture of Learning, contains specific classroom and co-curricular strategies. Based on the instructor interviews and observations, I define a culture of learning as a set of values and practices that guide college students through the learning process while treating them as adults and co-creators of knowledge. In a culture of learning, the supportive environment creates space for students to engage without shame or fear. The most common strategies used by these instructors to create a culture of learning include continually connecting back to past material; using relevant examples; incorporating humor, enthusiasm, and personality; being accessible and responsive; approaching students proactively; and practicing inclusive learning principles.

Across all my observations for this study, the most performed action of instructors was to continually connect the current material to previously learned content. For example, throughout his 80-minute class session, Elijah repeatedly drew connections to past material, saying things like, "We've seen this a bunch, we should know what this means." He also alluded to how the current topic would connect with future course content. Similarly, in his lecture, Chase made continual references to previous topics, saying "You'll remember…" These instructors indicated this cognitive strategy reinforces prior learning and helps students make big-picture connections. Ben also used this strategy and hinted that it was a way to engage students who had not prepared for the class or who had missed a class session. Verbalizing past content allowed these students to follow along. It seemed that this instructional strategy reinforced the idea that students should be constantly learning.

Instructors also used relevant examples to help students connect the material to their everyday lives. Heather mentioned to me that in her syllabus, she explains many of the assignments are designed to be applied to students' own lives and she will ask them to reflect on this. I also watched this happen during a few of my class observations. Elijah's course involved math equations and he used relevant and non-intimidating examples, such as buying winter clothing in January or analyzing Super Bowl data. Chase referenced examples that are currently impacting Ohio State students, as well as a recent viral Tik Tok video. Alexis referenced popular local restaurants and locations in the sentences he would have students complete for practice. Each of these instructors told me this was an intentional strategy to keep students interested and engaged, but also to help them see that what they are learning has a purpose.

Another way instructors created a positive culture of learning was through incorporating humor, enthusiasm, and personality. I was able to see this in action during my classroom observations. For example, Heather, Ben, and Donna both found ways to slide in witty remarks throughout their class sessions. Ben made silly analogies that left students giggling. Chase's lecture was delivered animatedly and enthusiastically. In the middle, he referenced Monty Python, which students are less familiar with today, but his retelling of a joke still made students laugh – and sit up in their chairs, their attention refocused. Donna also made occasional references to her past experiences in the industry. She told students she was unapologetically a scientist. Alexis's class session was taught in a foreign language I do not speak, so while I could not understand the content of his class session I observed, he was clearly lively, cheery, and light-hearted. He used hand

gestures, head nods, and facial expressions to communicate meaning. Students smiled and laughed in response to him throughout the class session. Overall, these instructors brought an engaging persona to the classroom.

Approaching students proactively also contributed to a culture of learning. This could occur within the classroom or beyond. Ben perhaps exemplified this best, as he wandered the room, asking students some variation of, "What questions do you have?" Similarly, during her lecture, Donna moved throughout the room, calling on individual students and asking them for examples. Elijah would make occasional references during his lecture to content or topics that students have asked him about in the past, as a way of proactively addressing anticipated questions. In terms of proactively approaching students outside of the classroom, Alexis, Chase, and Heather all spoke of sending email messages to students they thought might be struggling. Heather also talked about reaching out directly to students to let them know if she thought they would be a good candidate for grad school or other opportunities. Donna asked her students to fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of the term to collect data about how students were managing COVID and what hurdles were preventing them from learning. She would then connect them to resources as needed. These behaviors were interpreted by students as going above and beyond, but for these instructors, proactive actions like these were viewed as fundamental to teaching.

Lastly, implementing inclusive learning principles contributed to a culture of learning. Out of all six instructors, Elijah did this the most. For example, he used the captioning function on Zoom. Also, when he wrote out equations, he would write them

out numerically and in complete sentences. He would say out loud what he was writing while he was writing it. As a result, the difficult material was made accessible to a variety of learners. When I asked him about it later, my observation took him by surprise. "I don't do it purposely… I think that's something I've evolved into over time, but I don't remember anybody telling me to do that or saying this is a good way to do this or anything." He mentioned that he started using the Zoom captioning after a student asked for it once, but otherwise, he was not sure how or when he began incorporating the other strategies.

Another example comes from my observation of Ben. When talking with students, he would crouch down or lean in, postures that indicated he was listening carefully to students and they had his full attention. These postures also enabled students to literally meet him on the same level, which was of practical importance in a classroom that could get raucous during discussions. Other small actions instructors took to make learning accessible included streamlining PowerPoint slides, speaking to students clearly and loudly, making eye contact with students, and ensuring course material could be viewed from multiple places in the room.

All these actions contribute to Creating a Culture of Learning where students feel they belong, they are capable, and that learning has a purpose. Further, all of the actions that fall under this theme are reproducible in other classrooms and are examples of quality pedagogical approaches.

Demonstrating Care

162

Demonstrating Care is the second theme that captures how instructors support student success. This theme encompasses the actions instructors take to build relationships and create supportive spaces. Examples include building individual connections, stating up front they are there to help, and being invested in teaching. Each of the six instructors described ways in which they built individual connections with students. For example, before the COVID pandemic, Heather held "chat and chew" sessions once a month in the student union. She invited her students to come sit with her so they would have a chance to get to know each other. "I wanted to make myself available to students, for them to build a relationship with me that isn't just about school," she explained. Alexis built individual connections with students by conversing with them about current events happening in their lives, which also gave them an opportunity to practice the foreign language. I had the opportunity to observe both Elijah and Chase talk one-on-one with students, Elijah about research options and Chase about graduate school. At the same time, several of the instructors lamented the fact that their class sizes prevented them from building the relationships they might want to have. Donna captured this sentiment by saying:

> You want students to feel as though you know them, you care about them. I care about the students, but I can't possibly know a hundred students. You get to know the ones who make themselves known to you… for good reasons or for bad reasons.

Ben said, "It's really hard for me, because once a week we have 72 students in a lab. I can't learn their names, which is just frustrating."

Even with a large class size, instructors thought something they could easily do to enact care was to make it clear from the beginning that they were there to help. During each of my observations, I heard the instructor say some variation of "Please let me know how I can help you" during the class period. Ben noted that this behavior is not common across all instructors in his discipline. In his viewpoint, instructors may be willing to help if a student approaches them, but they may not care enough to proactively offer help. To him, that was the difference between those who really cared about teaching and those who used teaching as a paycheck while they worked on other career aspects. Alexis shared a similar perspective:

> From my own experience, I've met teachers who really cared less. Who [said], "Here's the materials. I've done part of my job. Now it's on you. If you don't study that, I don't care, it's you." I've had professors like that. I think those memories still haunt me.

Alexis told me he was actively striving to provide the opposite kind of experience for his students. Ben and Alexis both wanted to be known as instructors that care.

The concept of being rewarded for caring teaching came up a few times during the interviews. Elijah talked about how his role as a lecturer afforded him the chance to focus on teaching, whereas others in his department are obligated to focus on research. Chase told me the tenure-track faculty in his discipline "are always more involved in the gatekeeping functions… the functional outcomes and grade distributions and everything else." This was opposed to those in lecturer roles, who felt more freedom to care about students and their success. "We ain't doing this for the money, and we ain't doing this for

164

the prestige. We're doing it because we love to do it," he added. Ben, a graduate assistant, shared that he felt his care for teaching was what separated him from some of the other teaching assistants. He said:

> I try to care about [students], and I think that's absolutely part of teaching. To me, teaching is more than just presenting information. If that's all teaching was, then let's just go by the textbook and be done with it, right?

Heather had similar observations about differences in how instructors valued teaching, but also felt a false dichotomy was at play:

> Tenure track faculty may be shamed or encouraged not to care about their teaching as much. I think that's a mistake. Caring about something doesn't necessarily mean you spend more time on it. I can care about something and be well-balanced.

These instructors' views on the role of care in teaching have some overlap with students' perspectives, which I explore further in the next chapter.

During my interviews, I asked all six instructors directly whether care played a role in teaching, and if so, what that looked like. Elijah answered swiftly, saying yes, and defining care as "a willingness to help and being invested in people's futures." Heather nodded emphatically when I asked her this question. "Care definitely plays a role," she affirmed. "I care what people think of me and that they can come to me and ask questions. I care about teaching." Donna and Ben also quickly agreed that care plays a role in their teaching.

Alexis talked at length about his care for students. They are constantly on his mind and he continually considers how to teach and support them. Alexis told me:

I care about their wellbeing. I care about them being comfortable in class. When outside class, doing activities, doing homework, I also think about them… I would say that most of the time I have them in my head all the time, you know? Thinking about them, how are they doing? Yeah, I care. I care about their success, their wellbeing.

Like the other instructors, Alexis was strongly invested not only in providing quality teaching, but also making sure students' needs were met. This speaks to why students nominated these instructors for my study. Chase told me, "I don't think there's too many opportunities for the students to not feel like they are a number, that somebody cares." He went on to explain that he understands some of the difficult scenarios a student might be going through, such as housing, food, or financial insecurity. He talks about these topics openly in class, noting, "Maybe that ends up being an invitation for somebody to be like… he's going to think that the reason I'm struggling is because I'm going through X, as opposed to I'm a bad person or student." Care, then, also includes letting students know that they are seen as whole people, they belong, and they are valued. This theme of Demonstrating Care captures many of the specific actions instructors take to support students' academic success.

Meeting Students Where They Are

The last theme, Meeting Students Where They Are, is an instructional mindset and teaching approach that operationalizes the idea that all students can learn. This may

manifest in external actions or in internal thoughts. It might also be called a student-centered approach. This theme is based on an in vivo code that specifically originated with Ben. He used this phrase repeatedly in his interview. I also heard him say it directly to his students when I observed his teaching. Although Ben was the only instructor to specifically use this phrase, the other five provided examples indicating they also adopt this mindset. As an international student whose first language is not English, Alexis had not previously heard of the phrase, but once I explained it to him, he agreed that he "absolutely values" this concept.

At the core of this theme is an asset-based view that all student can learn. Heather said it was essential for instructors to "actually believe they can all be successful." Elijah told me something similar; he thought it was his responsibility to create conditions for students to learn. Indeed, Meeting Students Where They Are involved identifying and fulfilling student needs. These needs might be educational or personal. In terms of educational needs, Ben and Elijah would alter their course plans for the day if students need to spend more time on a specific topic. "I've been known to kind of stray and ask students what better suits their needs for that day," Ben explained.

To address his students' needs for social interaction, Chase tells them to talk to each other while he sets up the classroom technology. I observed him tell the class to "build your mental resiliency and make a friend." He then motioned them to turn and talk to each other – and they did, for three or four minutes. Alexis is also cognizant of his students' physical needs. His class period is 80 minutes long, but he gives them a five-

minute break, where they can use the restroom, drink water, or do whatever else they need to reset their focus.

Meeting student needs sometimes means giving second chances. Chase talked about the importance of giving students these opportunities:

> Students will miss a deadline or a quiz, and then that brings shame and guilt, and shame and guilt leads to avoidance… and they just shut down for the rest of the semester, and that deprives them of the opportunity to be reinforced for the good behaviors.

He went on to add that college students are never lacking an opportunity for consequences and negative reinforcement, but they rarely "get the opportunity to get reinforced for talking to the professor and being able to be proactive about repairing the damage and being able to get back on track." For Chase, Meeting Students Where They Are included offering them second chances in ways other instructors might not. Each participant gave me a concrete example of how they have identified and met their students' needs.

On the other hand, instructors also recognize students have agency. Donna and Elijah both talked about the fact that meeting students' needs takes work and students are not always willing to accept the help. Ben also acknowledged this and expressed some frustration about students who choose not to engage with him. "I'm more than willing to help you, but meet me halfway," he said. Heather also remarked on the important element of student agency: "I'm doing everything I can to help you learn and you're tearing down

every piece of scaffolding I'm putting up." While instructors do what they can to support struggling students, they also recognize that students must choose to help themselves.

This theme also encompasses the idea that instructors can normalize struggle. By expressing some vulnerability and sharing an appropriate level of detail about their lives, these instructors model that struggle is normal and it can be overcome. As graduate TAs, Alexis and Ben found value in the fact they know what it is like to be an Ohio State student. Ben said:

> I like relating to students and making it interesting. It might not be their favorite subject. I've got a stats class later today. It's not my favorite subject, but if we can make it interesting, we can get through it.

Both instructors indicated students sometimes seem more receptive to their advice because they are relatable in this way.

In her classroom, Heather is unafraid to be vulnerable if it models for other students that they can be successful. She told me:

> I tell them I'm a relatively socially anxious person… I do try to say to them, I practice all of these things too. These are skills. Students may look at faculty and think you have always been this person. Part of [my] teaching is to say every single one of you has the capability to be any version of yourself that you want to be in the future. I haven't always been this person either.

Sharing a little bit of herself in this way helps her seem relatable and approachable to students. She said this is especially important in her large lecture classes where it is not possible for her to get to know everyone.

Chase was also willing to talk openly with students about his own experiences, saying "that makes me more accessible." His partner had a baby during the middle of a semester and he shared his excitement about that with his students. When he came back to class, he would share "dad jokes." He told me:

> I'm all about the dad jokes. And on the one hand, trying to subtly model that I'm the primary caretaker for my kids, and being a dad is something that I can bend gender norms a little bit, to kind of model.

In doing this, his hope is to help students see they have more possibilities for future, beyond what they feel restricted to do by other people's expectations.

Chase shared with me his observation that students frequently think they are alone in their struggles:

> I used to see a lot of students who are in the pre-med program, and each one would come in and they would say, "Well, everybody else looks like they have their shit completely together, and I'm the only one that's struggling." And the next student would say, "I'm the only one who doesn't have my shit together." And I'm like, I wish I could break confidentiality and just get you all together for a beer, so you know everybody's struggling with something.

Chase, Heather, Alexis, and Ben all expressed the desire to openly normalize struggle as a way of meeting students where they are.

Interestingly, all the instructors in this study mentioned a teacher from their past who was a role model and mentor. For example, Elijah told me the story about his own undergraduate experience:

170

I also failed out of college two times, which is a little bit different I than I think

most people… but when I went back, there are a few professors that were very

inspirational and I wanted to do that kind of thing myself.

Donna also said, "When I think back to my days as an undergrad student, somebody

looked out for me. I did have some role models." Ben, Chase, and Heather referenced

graduate school faculty mentors. Alexis specifically talked about a pair of instructors he

had while in Europe who changed the way he thought about language learning and

inspired him to continue in his current career path. In each example, the mentor identified

their needs and took action to support them, meeting them where they were. In some

ways, the instructors are now paying this forward to their own students.

Points of Overlap

The purpose of this case study was to understand how instructors support the

academic success of historically underrepresented students who are struggling

academically. In investigating my research questions, I uncovered points of overlap

between how students and instructors understand academic success and struggle, and how

they believe academic support can be enacted. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate overlap in

understandings of academic success and struggle. Table 20 illustrates how themes of

academic support overlap.

171

Figure 5. Overlap in Themes of Success and Struggle, Part One

Growth Mindset

Success:
Perseverance
Certainty about major
Overall well-being

Struggle:
Low motivation
Unwilling to give full ability
Uncertainty about future direction

Increased or decreased curiosity and confidence

Attitudes and Outlooks

Success:
Views the course as a learning opportunity

Struggle:
Doesn't understand effort or workload required
Seems overwhelmed

Figure 6. Overlap in Themes of Success and Struggle, Part Two

Performance Measures

Success:
Maintains scholarship
Gets into desired major

Struggle:
Withdraws from courses
On academic probation
Grades of C or lower

Low/high course grades

Grades reflect effort

Repeats course

Tangible Outcomes

Success:
Completes course (even if via incomplete grade)

Struggle:
No increase in self-awareness or self-efficacy

Recall/apply material later (or not)

Knowledge helps with career

Integrating Knowledge

Success:
Truly understands material
Progresses to next course

Struggle:
Not immersed in material
Cannot connect to previous work

Good/poor attendance and/or comprehension

Productive Behaviors

Success:
Uses resources
Communicates when help is needed

Struggle:
Asks same question repeatedly
Uncommunicative or unresponsive

172

Table 20. Overlap in Data Themes about Enacting Support

Instructor Theme	Alignment with Student Data Themes	Quotes
Creating A Culture of Learning	• Creates More Motivation for Me	Student: "I made sure to get it done, turn it in… I care more [about the assignment] because she cares so much [about my learning]."
		Instructor: "The more they can be made to understand why they're being asked to do something, the better."
	• Puts The Joy into Learning	Student: "She's my first college professor that I really liked because of her energy."
		Instructor: "I want the experience to be fun. I don't know that my labs in undergrad were always fun, but to me that's kind of the point here."
	• Made Material Understandable	Student: "He knew some material was difficult, but he tried to make it as easy as possible to learn."
		Instructor: "We're talking about some topic and they're like, 'Why is that important?' Here's one reason why. So that kind of hooks their interest."
Demonstrating Care	• Treats Us as More Than Just Students	Student: "In terms of how I view caring, I think that just caring about you as a person, rather than seeing you just as a student."
		Instructor: "I said, 'Well, what were you like at 18? I'm sure I was the same way.' So I try not to lose that perspective."
	• If I Ever Needed Anything	Student: "He was always saying that he'd be there for office hours for anyone who needed it."

Continued

173

Table 20 Continued

Instructor Theme	Alignment with Student Data Themes	Quotes
	• If I Ever Needed Anything (continued)	Instructor: "After the pandemic, just everything was completely cattywampus. At that point, it makes sense to just be like, whatever we can do to get to the end of the finish line, let's do it."
Meeting Students Where They Are	• Didn't Make You Feel Dumb	Student: "She understood if we didn't know something [it was] because we were just learning."
		Instructor: "I tell them, I know this is difficult… Regardless of the subject, education in my opinion is the hardest thing you can do."
	• Not Here to Hurt Your Grades	Student: "He made it clear at the beginning of the class that he understands we're all coming from different backgrounds with different goals… and graded us based on what he knew we could do."
		Instructor: "If I can help students move toward what they want to get out of the course, that's success to me."

This overlap is further discussed in the Chapter 5, where I also connect these findings to aspects of the literature and make recommendations for future action. This overlap matters because it speaks to a consistent set of actions that both instructors and students view as important for academic success. In other words, there is congruence between what instructors believed would support students and what students said helped them the most – a common vision for a specific pedagogy.

174

Summary

This chapter highlighted my findings, beginning with student-centered data. I first discussed students' perspectives on academic success and struggle, which aligned with three themes: Performance Measures, Developing a Growth Mindset, and Integrating Knowledge. I also explained how students identify instructors who support their success. I used in vivo codes to group students' perspectives into several categories: Creates More Motivation for Me, Puts the Joy into Learning, Didn't Make You Feel Dumb, Not Here to Hurt Your Grades, Made Material Understandable, Treats Us as More Than Just Students, and If I Ever Needed Anything. Next, I presented biographies of six instructors who were nominated by students. I outlined instructors' understandings of academic success and struggle, which included Productive Behaviors, Attitudes and Outlooks, and Tangible Outcomes. I also discussed three key instructor strategies for supporting historically underrepresented students who are struggling academically: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. Finally, I detailed points of overlap between student and instructor viewpoints with respect to the actions taken to support student academic success.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to explore and understand a phenomenon of teaching, specifically the strategies instructors enacted to support the success of their historically underrepresented students who struggle academically. I also explored how students in this population identified the instructors they believed supported their academic success, and how both students and instructors understood academic success and struggle. I reviewed demographic data from a questionnaire. I also performed thematic analysis on qualitative data from the questionnaire, interviews, and observations of teaching. Thematic analysis resulted in three key themes that underly how these instructors enacted support: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are.

I begin this chapter by summarizing and aligning the results within the four research questions that guided my study. I also discuss the findings thematically, situating them within the existing research literature. I follow this with a discussion of limitations and strengths of the study. Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Interpreting Findings in Relation to Research Questions

In this section I review how the emergent findings relate to the four research questions guiding this study, which were:

1. How do historically underrepresented students (HUS) understand academic success and struggle?

2. How do HUS identify instructors who they believe support their academic success?

3. How do instructors understand academic success and struggle for HUS?

4. How do instructors enact academic support for HUS?

In the following subsections, I summarize the findings, relate them to each research question, and situate them in existing literature.

How Do Historically Underrepresented Students Understand Academic Success and Struggle?

Students offered a range of indicators of academic success and struggle. The first emerging theme was Performance Measures. Indicators of success included earning a specific GPA to enter one's major or keep one's scholarship. However, students had different standards for measuring their success by grades. Not a single student mentioned having a 4.0 cumulative GPA as a measure of success. While some mentioned having a 3.0 cumulative GPA or B+ average, others wanted to earn a grade that was just high enough to enter the next course. Signs of struggle included being on academic probation or losing financial aid eligibility. Given that all participants had previously experienced academic struggle, perhaps they had tempered their expectations or had a more realistic assessment of their abilities. More importantly, students indicated an understanding that grades were not the only measure of success.

Developing a Growth Mindset was a second theme emerging from the student data. This theme captured ideas of engagement, perseverance, recovering from setbacks, motivation, and maintaining overall well-being. These ideas overlap with the principles of growth mindset theory (Dweck, 1999; Dweck & Yeager, 2019). According to participants, successful students viewed challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as indicators of fixed behaviors that could not be improved. They set reasonable goals, attended class regularly, and gave their best effort to a course. In contrast, struggling students had poor attendance, low motivation, and were unwilling to commit the effort needed to succeed. Struggling students also had a loud inner critic, leading them to doubt their intellect and abilities. This concept of Growth Mindset overlaps with Schreiner's (2012) concept of academic thriving, which includes psychological and social well-being. Participants thought that having a Growth Mindset was an essential foundation for learning.

Integrating Knowledge was the final emerging theme. For students, learning encompassed immersion in the material. A successful student would master difficult concepts and absorb important ideas that could help them now or in the future. Successful students also participated in class and developed new skills. On the other hand, struggling students had difficulty understanding material, which led to a vicious cycle – the more they struggled, the less information they retained, and the poorer they performed. Struggling students were also disinterested in their coursework and were unwilling or unable to ask for help.

Overall, students named a variety of indicators of both success and struggle. This aligns with calls in the research literature for measures of success that go beyond performance and retention statistics (e.g., Akos & James, 2020; Hensley et al., 2018; Kinzie, 2020; Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019). Some indicators were more tangible than others, for example, grades are external, quantifiable measures, while developing an ability to integrate knowledge is an internal marker. Furthermore, some indicators were easier to overcome than others. A student might work with an academic advisor or career coach to discover a best-fit major or career, but developing internal motivation is much more challenging. But students agreed that supportive instructors helped them move from struggle to success.

How Do Historically Underrepresented Students Identify Instructors Who They Believe Support Their Academic Success?

Student participants gave plenty of examples of instructor dispositions and behaviors that they felt indicated an instructor was supportive of their success. Instructors proved themselves to be both willing and able to help. These dispositions and behaviors were categorized into one of seven themes: Creates More Motivation for Me, Puts the Joy into Learning, Didn't Make You Feel Dumb, Made Material Understandable, Not Here to Hurt Your Grades, Treats Us as More Than Just Students, and If I Ever Needed Anything.

Students described how instructors supported their learning through encouragement and reassurance, holding high expectations, putting clear effort into their teaching, and connecting subject matter to students' experiences (Castillo-Montoya,

179

2019; Delima, 2019; Gabriel, 2018; Roksa & Whitley, 2019). These dispositions and behaviors inspired students to be more motivated. Students also appreciated when instructors let their personalities shine through when teaching (Hagenauer et al., 2016; Means & Pyne, 2017; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). They valued instructors who interacted with them with enthusiasm, a sense of humor, and a passion for the course material (Hagenauer et al., 2016; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). Additionally, supportive instructors were approachable, patient, non-judgmental, and not condescending (Nunn, 2019; Schreiner et al., 2012). Students felt they could approach these instructors when they needed help because the instructors were responsive and made themselves available (Means & Pyne, 2017; Miller & Mills, 2019; Schreiner et al., 2012). Students also appreciated when instructors acknowledged and corrected their own mistakes, which modeled how mistakes were a natural part of the learning process (Manning et al., 2014; Means & Pyne, 2017; Schreiner et al., 2012). Above all, students appreciated instructors who treated them with kindness, acknowledged them as whole people with lives outside of the classroom, connected them to resources and support, and made personal connections (Bell & Santamaría, 2018a; Burke & Larmar, 2020; Collins-Warfield & Niewoehner-Green, 2021; Miller & Mills, 2019; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). These findings paralleled existing research on the best instructional practices for supporting the academic success of historically underrepresented students.

Supportive instructors made student learning possible by translating difficult course material into something more understandable. This was done through feedback, making accommodations for student learning, remaining open to questions, and trying

more than one approach. These instructors were also communicative, clear, and engaging. Students had the sense that these instructors were not there to hurt their grades; rather, they truly wanted students to learn. Instructors conveyed this through flexibility, accessibility, proactively providing help for challenging topics, and giving students a second chance. These dispositions and behaviors communicated to students that they were worthy of respect.

Students appreciated when instructors attempted to make personal connections and acknowledged each student as a whole person. These instructors seemed to understand that students' lives outside of the classroom impacted their academic success. Supportive instructors were concerned, friendly, and caring. They also actively engaged students on topics not related to the course. This included spending time at the beginning of class checking in with students and asking how they were doing. Lastly, supportive instructors found ways to communicate to students, "I am here for you." They might communicate this message explicitly in class, but they also conveyed it through genuine interest and a welcoming attitude. Taken together, these dispositions and behaviors led students to feel like they could be successful in college, whether that success was measured by achieving specific grades, growing as a person, or accomplishing significant learning. This overlaps with L. A. Schreiner's (2012) ideas on academic thriving (engaged learning, meaningful connection, and intellectual growth) and Kinzie's (2020) call for an expanded definition of success that incorporates intellectual and personal development.

How Do Instructors Understand Academic Success and Struggle for Historically Underrepresented Students?

Instructors' contributions to this study were organized into three themes: Productive Behaviors, Attitudes and Outlooks, and Tangible Outcomes. Each theme had some overlap with students' measures of success and struggle. The first theme, Productive Behaviors, captured how instructors and students both listed class engagement as a sign of success and poor attendance as a sign of struggle. While students conceptualized these indicators as related to their learning (i.e., if I do not go to class then I cannot learn), instructors viewed these indicators as visible, practical behaviors – almost like readable signs of success or struggle. For instructors, successful behaviors also included learning to ask questions and to seek help by using office hours. Communicating challenges to the instructor (learning or otherwise) was also viewed as a sign of success. On the other hand, being uncommunicative or unreachable was an indicator of struggle as the student had disengaged from the course. Also, students who asked the same question more than once could be struggling with learning comprehension. As observers of students, instructors were able to name very specific behaviors that indicated success or struggle.

The second theme, Attitudes and Outlooks, had some parallels to the student theme of Growth Mindset. Both instructors and students viewed increased confidence as a sign of success and lack of motivation as a sign of struggle. Yet instructors emphasized that successful students view education as a learning opportunity, even if a course was not in their major or if their career goals were unclear. Instructors also named several

mindsets that impede success, such as having unrealistic expectations about grades, underestimating the amount of time and effort required, or feeling overwhelmed by the course material or difficulty level. Perhaps instructors had a bit more foresight as they guided students to specific outcomes, whether in a specific course or in life after college.

Tangible Outcomes was the third theme. There was some overlap between student and instructor responses regarding grades as a measurable indicator of success and struggle. Low grades were of course a sign of struggle, whereas reaching one's desired grade was a sign of success, even if that grade was not an A. Instructors viewed students as moving from struggle to success if they were able to communicate their circumstances and finish the course via an incomplete grade, rather than withdrawing from or stopping out of the course. Other success outcomes included being able to recall the material later, as for an exam, and being able to apply material or skills learned in a student's post-college life. Students who were struggling were unable to achieve these outcomes.

Some of these indicators of success and struggle were more visible and measurable than others. Behaviors like coming to class and asking for help made success more obvious. However, some measures were more internal (such as motivation), and an instructor might not know a student was struggling unless the student communicated it. Further, not all students had the same goals; in other words, one student's low grade was another student's best. The measures of success mentioned by these instructors incorporate ideas of self-discovery, self-regulated learning, and personal and social development. These measures parallel other success definitions that focus on more than just retention and persistence statistics by emphasizing elements of student development

183

(e.g., Akos et al., 2020; Akos & James, 2020; Kinzie, 2020; Kraft-Terry & Kau, 2019; L. A. Schreiner, 2012; L. A. Schreiner et al., 2012). With all these measures in mind, instructors enacted several strategies to help students attain success.

How Do Instructors Enact Support for Historically Underrepresented Students?

Through interviews and observations, I gained insight into how instructors enacted support for struggling students. Three significant themes emerged from data analysis: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. Each theme encompassed several actions an instructor might take.

Creating a Culture of Learning

Instructors enacted support for students by Creating a Culture of Learning. A culture of learning was a set of values and practices that guided college students through the learning process while treating them as adults and co-creators of knowledge. In such a culture, students felt free to participate in their learning without fear or shame. Instructors created a culture of learning by using relevant examples that connect to students' lives. They also established this culture by incorporating humor and enthusiasm, normalizing struggle, and admitting when they make a mistake. A culture of learning was also exhibited by instructors who anticipated student questions, proactively offered help, reached out to students they thought might be struggling, used inclusive learning principles, created a welcoming environment, were transparent about expectations and policies, fulfilled requests for accommodations, and followed accessibility guidelines such as using closed captioning (e.g., Mehta & Aguilera, 2020; Nunn, 2019; Siliman, 2020).

184

A culture of learning is one in which students feel free to engage in the learning process without shame or fear. This type of classroom culture is crucial to support the academic success of HUS. All too often, students in these populations are viewed by instructors as intellectually inferior, meaning instructors adopt a deficit-based view of students and student success (Harris, 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020; Walton & Brady, 2021). A deficit-based view focuses on what a student lacks and frames struggle as the result of a student's background (Gable, 2021; McNair et al., 2016). A deficit-based view may be seen as implying that a student experiences struggle due to some moral or character flaw (Harper, 2010; McNair et al., 2016; Motta & Bennett, 2018). It neatly minimizes institutional responsibility for student academic success (Bassett, 2020). In this study, deficit-based views were most evident when students spoke of instructors they felt were condescending, and these were not the instructors they nominated. In comparison, the instructors who were nominated for the study believed all students were capable of learning.

The instructors in this study recognized the need to take action to support their students' success. They frequently tried more than one approach. I observed instructors in each of the six courses providing content examples that were relatable to students while also routinely linking the current content to past material. They also took several actions to create an inclusive environment, for example, Elijah's use of Zoom captioning or Ben's willingness to crouch down next to a student and meet them at eye level. The instructors also brought their personalities to class and were unafraid to use humor or personal stories to relay information and connect with students. This was captured in the

185

student theme of Puts the Joy into Learning. Displaying emotion in the classroom is important for building community (Hagenauer et al., 2016). Students who perceive their teachers as happy and positive have a more positive attitude towards learning and greater motivation (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). In sum, these instructors' efforts resulted in students feeling more motivated and more willing to tackle challenging material.

In a culture of learning, "recognition, respect, and appreciation" are present (Gabriel, 2018, p.24). Instructors are interested in and dedicated to creating meaningful student experiences (Delima, 2019; Gabriel, 2018b). In particular, the themes Didn't' Make You Feel Dumb and Treats Us as More Than Just Students captured the idea that students valued instructors who respected their intelligence, recognized their effort, and appreciated them as whole people. Whether they were conscious of it or not, instructors in this study did adopt asset-based thinking. An asset-based approach to understanding students is especially important for historically underrepresented populations who have encountered bias, prejudice, and discrimination in the classroom and in higher education as an institution (Bondy & Hambacher, 2016; Harper, 2010; McNair et al., 2016).

Creating a Culture of Learning overlapped with the student themes of Creates More Motivation for Me, Puts the Joy into Learning, and Made Material Understandable. These student themes reflected students' perceptions of instructors who believed in their ability to be successful, while also creating conditions to make success possible. In such a classroom culture, students felt they were capable.

Demonstrating Care

The second theme, Demonstrating Care, included several more actions instructors took to build supportive spaces for students. These actions included establishing individual connections, or making an honest attempt to build them, depending on the number of students in the course. Caring also included conveying to students that teaching is a top priority. Examples included continually reminding students of a willingness to help, investing time into lesson plans, and maintaining awareness of student well-being. The instructor theme of Demonstrating Care overlapped with the student themes of Treats Us as More Than Just Students and If I Ever Needed Anything. Later in this chapter, I explore the participants' enactment of care in relation to Noddings' (2003) pedagogy of care.

Each of the six instructors I interviewed and observed expressly told me that care plays an important role in their teaching. Their definitions of care included willingness to help students, desire to invest in students' futures, commitment to providing quality teaching, and a responsibility for understanding and providing for students' needs. These definitions lined up with several elements in Noddings' (2003, 2005) pedagogy of care. The instructors also expressed care through affirming their students' participation in class. Several students mentioned that these displays of care helped motivate them. As one student said, "To know that there are people who want to see you do good, it helps with that motivational aspect." This aligned with other studies which reported students are willing to work hard and engage if they believe a faculty member cares about their success (e.g., Miller & Mills, 2019). Caring instructors foster well-being and resiliency in students, particularly first-generation students (Means & Pyne, 2017). A caring

environment builds trust and enables students to "form healthy relationships, engage in constructive risk taking, and pursue developmental tasks" (Manning et al., 2014, p. 137).

While the instructors in this study did not explicitly adopt a social justice perspective, they were nonetheless aware that students from varying backgrounds could experience unique challenges in college. When something outside of class impacted a student's performance in class, they were willing to be flexible and accommodating so the student could still participate in the course. The theme If I Ever Needed Anything captured this idea. The recognition that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to care is at the heart of critical care pedagogy (e.g. Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Falk-Rafael, 2005). Donna was a perfect example, as she let students know about the incomplete grade option and then worked with them to set up an individualized plan to finish their work. As another example, one student described her instructor meeting with her in the evening because it was the only time that fit her work schedule. Accommodation and flexibility can make a difference for any student who is experiencing circumstances beyond their control, but especially for low-income students who are trying to balance working with going to school (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Williams & Martin, 2021).

These instructors' caring actions not only helped guide students to academic success, but they also helped students feel valued. This is particularly important for Students of Color, who at Ohio State have a lower sense of being cared for and valued by their faculty (Center for the Study of Student Life, 2019; Strayhorn, 2012). More than one student reported a sense of being seen by their instructor as a "whole" person, as reflected in the theme Treats Us as More Than Just Students. Valuing students' diverse

experiences, encouraging students' authentic voices, and recognizing a student's unique forms of cultural wealth are all manifestations of care that result in students feeling supported, confident, and capable (Ezarik, 2022a; Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005).

Meeting Students Where They Are

Caring actions also connected to the last theme, Meeting Students Where They Are. The idea of meeting students where they are might also be called a student-centered approach. This approach to teaching was centered on the firm belief that all students are capable of learning. Meeting Students Where They Are included taking responsibility for creating conditions where students can successfully learn. It entailed recognizing that students have different goals and abilities. It also meant giving students a second chance when they made a mistake, rather than shaming them for not being prepared. Heather explained it as follows:

> It's also easy to lose sight of the various pressures students feel. They come to us with different levels of preparedness. Some of them are perfectly ready to take whatever anyone can give them… It's easy for folks who have been successful in academia to look back and think "I wasn't like that when I was a student, they should be like me" – without appreciating the things that made it possible for them, that these students don't have access to. Professors need to remember that students are not you.

Along the same lines, instructors in this study felt it was essential to normalize struggle and vulnerability, as this helped students see that everyone faces setbacks. This theme

189

overlapped with the student themes of Didn't Make You Feel Dumb and Not Here to Hurt Your Grades.

Roksa and Whitley (2017) found that "Faculty who employ more student-centered approaches tend to facilitate student success" (p. 335). In this study, instructors acknowledged that students have different goals and thus success measured by grades vary accordingly. For example, Ben spoke of the different challenges involved in working with a student who wanted to earn the highest grade possible versus a student whose goal was to earn a passing grade in the course. Interestingly, his nominator picked up on this tailored approach, stating that Ben graded fairly based on what he knew they could accomplish. The student-generated theme of Not Here to Hurt Your Grades encapsulated the instructors' acknowledgement that students have different goals, skills, and abilities, but they can all still succeed if met with appropriate support.

Meeting students where they are also involved pushing them to grow. Alexis' nominator captured this when she discussed how he created conditions that pushed the whole class forward, while also providing support to help them reach their individual goals. Growth mindset and ability to change were important measures of student success (Caruth, 2018). Students were more likely to stay engaged and use resources if they thought their instructor believed they were capable of growing and learning (Ryan et al., 2020). Additionally, instructors who normalized challenges and gave students tools to respond to difficulties were important for academic success (Ezarik, 2022a; Ryan et al., 2020). Heather, Alexis, and Ben all referenced moments in their teaching when they

showed a little vulnerability with their students. These actions were also represented in the theme Didn't Make You Feel Dumb.

A belief that all students can learn was indicative of an instructor's commitment to helping them achieve success and thrive (Bondy & Hambacher, 2016; Manning et al., 2014). Elijah captured this idea in his sentiment that being willing to help people out can even make up for instructors' other mistakes or weaknesses. For historically underrepresented student populations, instructors who express a genuine willingness to help – and follow through on it – demonstrate an institutional commitment to not just recruiting diverse students, but serving and benefitting them once they arrive (Codallo et al., 2019; Ezarik, 2022a; Franklin et al., 2019; Iverson, 2005; Means & Pyne, 2017; Tobolowsky et al., 2020). It is clear that instructors made a powerful impact.

Impact of Instructors on Student Success

Research indicated that college instructors played a critical role in student success, both in and out of the classroom (Bensimon, 2007; K. C. Booker et al., 2016; Delima, 2019; Ezarik, 2022a, 2022b; Gabriel, 2018b; Schreiner et al., 2012). Instructor attitudes, perceptions, and pedagogical approaches all directly impacted the academic success of HUS, turning the classroom into a key location for interaction, connection, and belonging (Benson & Lee, 2020; Jack & Irwin, 2018; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017; Schreiner et al., 2012). Findings from both students and instructors in this study supported this existing research. In their questionnaire responses and interviews, students described how attitudes (e.g., Puts the Joy into Learning), perceptions (e.g., Didn't Make You Feel Dumb), and pedagogical approaches (e.g., Made Material Understandable)

impacted their academic success. These attitudes, perceptions, and pedagogical approaches also strengthened students' connections to both the university as an institution and the broader idea that they can be successful in college. Similarly, through observations and interviews, it became clear that these instructors wanted to have a positive impact on students and were willing to take the necessary steps to make that happen. These instructors demonstrated how college teaching is "cognitive, emotional and embodied work" (V. Anderson et al., 2020, p. 1) and it is worth doing if it leads to student academic success and thriving in the future.

Limitations and Strengths

There are several limitations to this study which should be considered when reviewing findings and considering future implications. Several limitations were outlined in chapter three and I will include a few here. However, the study also has notable strengths which I also highlight.

Limitations

I begin by reviewing the study's delimitations and the ways the case was bounded. A case is a unit that allows for in-depth study (Saldaña, 2011). It is a bounded system with specific elements of context, time, and place (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The case in this study was the phenomenon of how instructors enacted support for the academic success of historically underrepresented students who experienced academic struggle while at Ohio State. These instructors were nominated by students because they were supportive of their academic success. The 21 nominated instructors all taught classes within the last three years. This is an important point, because some of these

classes were taught prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (before Spring 2020), some were taught during the semester of the forced transition to online learning (Spring 2020), and others were taught during the pandemic (Summer 2020 and beyond). The timeframe for the course almost certainly impacted a student's experience with that course and the instructor. Consideration for the impact of COVID-19 was outside the scope of this study; there is a growing body of literature exploring this impact (see for example, Collins-Warfield & Niewoehner-Green, 2021). I selected the phenomenon of teaching as the case because this phenomenon is critical to understanding how HUS are supported in their academic success.

The findings of this study may not be transferable to a broad population because of the small sample size and specific context, but they were not intended to be (Yin, 2018). Case study methodology was chosen to explore research questions of "how" and "why" within a specific real-life context (Yin, 2018). Additionally, this case study was designed to be exploratory, not explanatory. The study was meant to examine and clarify the phenomenon of instructor support for student academic success. Although some instructors may have hinted at the "why" behind their actions, that was not the focus of this study; it was not meant to explain or prove a theory (A. Mills et al., 2010b). Any potential linkages I made would be used to inform a future explanatory study, not the current exploratory study.

The social identities of instructors were a limitation in this study. As indicated in Table 17 in the previous chapter, four of six participants were male, and five of six participants were White. Although this was a very homogenous sample, it also reflected

proportions of faculty diversity at Ohio State. In Autumn 2019, Ohio State faculty were

45% female and 55% male (Ohio State University Office of Human Resources, 2019).

Additionally, 24.5% were Faculty of Color and 70% were White (the remainder were

nondisclosed) (Ohio State University Office of Human Resources, 2019). Refer to Table

21 for a comparison between instructors interviewed for this study and Ohio State

broadly (Ohio State University Office of Human Resources, 2019). In this table,

"faculty" is defined as tenure track, clinical, research, and associated faculty.

Additionally, intersectional data was not available (e.g., Women of Color, White men). I

did not include the demographic data for all 21 instructors nominated for my study

because I did not get the chance to meet each of them and ask for their background

information. It was not appropriate for me to speculate on how they might identify.

Table 21. Demographics of Six Instructors in This Study Versus 7583 Faculty at Ohio
State

	Interviewed Instructors	Faculty as of AU19
Female	33%	45%
Male	66%	55%
Faculty of Color	16.7%	24.5%
White	83.3%	70%

I made multiple attempts to contact potential instructors for interviews, but only six

responded. However, the demographics of these six interviewed instructors were fairly

representative of the university at large.

Teaching format was also a potential limitation to this study. Specifically, only

seven of the 21 courses referenced in the pool of nominated instructors were taught in-

person, but all six classes I observed for this study were in-person. The method of delivery influences both instructors' strategies for supporting students and students' experiences within these courses. Previous studies have shown that online delivery requires different strategies and approaches for student success (Adams & Rose, 2014; Burke & Larmar, 2020; Hamman, 2018). Therefore, the strategies I uncovered in this study may or may not be relevant in an online setting.

A final limitation is my potential for researcher bias. I personally knew each student who chose to participate in this study. I had taught and/or advised each of these students and was already familiar with many of their struggles. I was concerned that students may share less detail with me because they know I am already familiar with their backstories (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). In reality, I believe students may have shared more than they would have with an unfamiliar researcher, because they were already comfortable talking with me and trusted me with their stories. I was not viewed as a detached researcher so much as a dependable confidant, which may have enabled me to gather richer detail.

Additionally, I shared the first-generation student identity with my participants, and I had previously experienced academic struggle. While this contributed to theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 2018), it may also have influenced me to have a preconceived perspective. To manage this, I triangulated data between individual participants, between students and instructors, and between the three research methods (i.e., questionnaire, interviews, observations). I also included negative and discrepant information in my analysis. I spent prolonged time in the field – conducting over 4.5 hours of student

interviews, 7 hours of instructor interviews, and 7 hours of instructor observations. I kept diligent memos throughout the research process, reflecting on my findings and my involvement with the research. I also spoke with trusted colleagues about potential for bias in my analysis of the findings.

There is also an important point to address concerning identity. While it seemed that identity did not matter to students or instructors when it came to enacting academic support, there are some potential limitations to making that determination. Even if I had previously established strong relationships with the student participants as their academic advisor, I was still a White woman interviewing and engaging with diverse students including several Students of Color. My identities may have influenced what students chose to share with me and why they did not describe identity as important in the way I had anticipated. Students may not have been comfortable talking to me about how race or other identities impacted their relationships with instructors and their perceptions of care, particularly if their nominated instructor was also White. Although I had previously engaged in one-on-one conversations with some of the students about the challenges of being a Student of Color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), they may still have chosen to downplay the impact of identity to give me a response they thought I would want to hear because they cared about me and wanted to support my study.

As the faculty demographic data in Table 21 suggest, a Student of Color at Ohio State could reasonably expect not to be taught by an instructor who looks like them. The reality is that Students of Color make choices every day to survive the micro- and macroaggressions they encounter at a PWI (e.g., Harris, 2017; Lewis & Shah, 2019; K. J.

196

Mills, 2020). This includes how they interact with instructors. Perhaps identity was not foregrounded by these students because they have come to expect they will not encounter culturally relevant caring experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2019). The same could potentially be said for low-income students who experience classism (Means & Pyne, 2017; Schultz, 2012) or first-generation students who experience discrimination (Azmitia et al., 2018; Bell & Santamaría, 2018b).

Alternatively, just as instructors could not always tell if a student held a specific identity, the students might not have known whether an instructor held a specific identity, particularly first-generation status or socioeconomic status. When encountering an instructor with a terminal degree like a doctorate, which suggests years of education and the financial means to attain it, a student might make assumptions about that instructor's social class or educational background, and not expect that instructor would share similar identities. Further, not all students view all identities as salient to their education. For example, not all first-generation students resonate with that label or consider it to be applicable to their college experience (Gable, 2021). Even though I asked students to self-identify, they may have marked "first-generation" because they knew they fit the technical definition, without really believing the identity is relevant. Therefore, identity may not have come up as expected in this study because students did not know instructors shared their identities and/or did not consider a particular identity to be pertinent to their academic career at Ohio State. Additional research is needed to investigate the role of identity in the enactment of care in the classroom. I explore this

197

and other research possibilities later in this chapter. First, I describe the strengths of this study.

Strengths

I adopted a critical-constructivist epistemological perspective within this study. I sought to understand and interpret how students and instructors make meaning. By focusing on historically underrepresented students, I sought to amplify voices and ways of knowing that are often excluded (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Levitt, 2021; Yosso, 2005). To assist with this, I began this study with a student-centered focus, which makes it unique. Rather than make assumptions about which instructors had a positive impact on HUS academic success, I asked the students to make nominations. Additionally, I tried to create space for students and instructors to talk about the importance of social identities in academic success, which could challenge dominant narratives about student-instructor interaction (Levitt, 2021).

This study also contributed to some important gaps in the literature. There is a lack of literature focusing on supporting the academic success of HUS. Previous research focused on co-curricular settings rather than classroom practices and activities (e.g. Gabriel, 2018c; Teven, 2007). This study specifically focused on classroom practices and activities. Additionally, the existing literature on ways to enact care in and out of the classroom does not emphasize supporting marginalized populations (Dowie-Chin & Schroeder, 2020; Gholami, 2011; Mehta & Aguilera, 2020; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). This study attempted to contribute to that gap by including student participants who identified with one or more historically underrepresented population. This study also

198

contributed to the body of literature on pedagogy of care, which primarily focuses on K-12 education (McKamey, 2011, 2017; Noddings, 2003, 2005; Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016). Lastly, I brought a unique perspective, combining caring and critical pedagogy as a means of supporting HUS academic success, whereas previous researchers did not specifically focus on academics (Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020).

This study contributed several unique and important perspectives. Previous research on the role of instructors in college student success emphasized tenure-track faculty (e.g., Booker et al., 2016; Gable, 2021; Haynes et al., 2020). However, tenure-track faculty are not the only instructors who interact with students. At a large Land-Grant institution like Ohio State, many of a student's classes in their first two years are taught by Lecturers, Graduate Teaching Assistants, and even staff such as academic advisors. By allowing students to nominate instructors of any credit-bearing course, this study expanded the potential pool of pedagogical knowledge. This was particularly important because, as Heather and Elijah pointed out, tenure-track faculty are generally not rewarded for emphasizing teaching, whereas these other instructors have more opportunity to focus on best practices for instruction.

Finally, this study attempted to highlight the unique intersection of student identity plus student academic struggle. It was critical to focus on this population because the literature indicated identity may be related to academic struggle (i.e., students with specific identities encounter barriers in the classroom). Even if identity did not resonate with participants in this way, identity still impacts students' overall experiences with college, because the system was built to serve the dominant classes, specifically White,

wealthy men (H. Giroux, 2017; McLaren, 2017), especially at 1862 Land-Grants (Behle, 2013; Brown, 2003; Goldstein et al., 2019; Hytche, 1992).

It is important to keep in mind the limitations and strengths of this study when reviewing the study's potential implications. Next, I outline implications for theory, practice, and research.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Future Research

This study yielded several implications for theorizing, practice, and research. In this section, I provide a revised model of Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy (SRCCP). I also share theoretical implications related to centering identity and social justice and caring-about versus caring-for (Noddings, 2003, 2005). Next, I offer suggestions for improving instructor practice. Last, I discuss possible considerations for future scholars who are interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning and student academic success.

Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this case study was to explore the phenomenon of instructor support for historically underrepresented students who are struggling academically. This study was designed to contribute to the literature around how instructors of all types support the academic success of historically underrepresented undergraduates. To frame this exploration, I proposed a theoretical framework, Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy. I now explore how my findings revise and strengthen this framework, as well as how the framework contributes to other theoretical implications, including centering social justice and identity, and caring-about versus caring-for (Noddings, 2003, 2005).

Revisiting the Model of Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy

Guided by the literature review, I proposed SRCCP as a set of teaching and learning strategies instructors might use to guide struggling students to academic success. This included but perhaps was not limited to students from marginalized identities. My findings support the framework of SRCCP as a set of inclusive teaching and learning principles that guide struggling students to success through a combination of proactive and reactive strategies. In this model, care was intentionally incorporated in pursuit of empowering students to learn, meet their own definitions of success, and create and attain the future they desire. This pedagogy is further outlined in Figure 7.

Creating a Culture of Learning

Purpose: Guide students to master the learning process

Task: Implement values and practices to guide student learning while honoring student autonomy and capacity to create knowledge

Example behaviors: use inclusive learning principles, provide relevant examples, remain accessible when help is needed

Demonstrating Care

Purpose: Communicate to students that they matter

Tasks: Integrate caring about teaching and learning; build relationships and create supportive spaces

Example behaviors: affirm student participation, take personal interest, recognize students' lives beyond the classroom impact their success

Meeting Students Where They Are

Purpose: Signal to students that they are capable of success

Task: Embody the mindset that all students are capable of learning

Example behaviors: tailor instruction to student needs, support development of growth mindset, offer second chances, normalize struggle
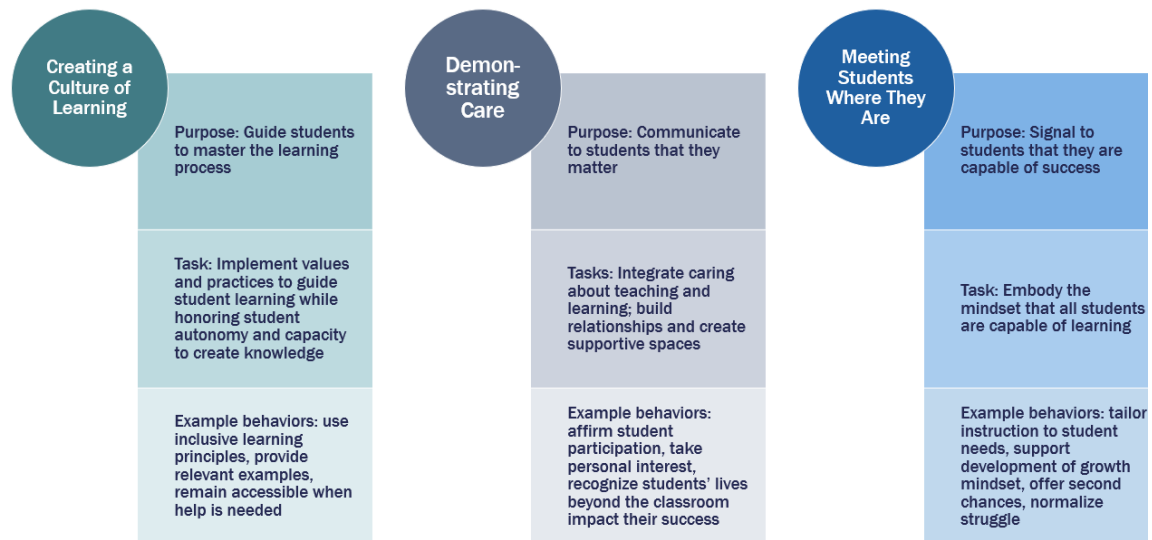
Figure 7. Defining Characteristics of Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy

The foundation of the SRCCP framework included numerous critical educational concepts. Yet the findings challenged the ways I envisioned certain critical concepts

manifesting in instructor actions and in students' priorities. I now revisit the issue of the contradictory evidence that challenged my way of thinking about instructor support.

Centering Identity and Social Justice

This framework drew on elements of critical pedagogy (e.g. Darder et al., 2017; Kincheloe, 2008), pedagogy of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005), radical love (e.g. Freire, 1970; hooks, 2018; Lane, 2018), critical care pedagogy (e.g. Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997), and a student-ready institutional framework (McNair et al., 2016). As mentioned in chapter four, the literature review informed my research questions. I presumed that students' identities mattered when it came to understanding academic success, struggle, and support. For example, Means and Pyne (2017) and Tobolowsky et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of including first-generation perspectives in the curriculum, actively valuing first-generation students' experiences, and challenging one's personal biases by understanding how this identity impacts students. Similarly, Nguyen and Herron (2021) and Williams and Martin (2021) discussed the need for understanding how the consequences of affordability and financial insecurity impacted a student's academic performance. Acosta (2018) and Guthrie et al. (2013) discussed how race was often the most salient identity of Students of Color and informed how they engage with the institution, including classroom learning. Lastly, Strayhorn (2012) explicitly said that understanding students' social identities was essential to helping them find belonging and success in college. Taken together, this scholarship suggested that understanding and centering identity was an essential component of supporting the academic success of marginalized students.

However, only one student and no instructors in this study cited identity as an influential factor. As discussed in the limitations section, there are several reasons why this may have occurred. Instead of centering identity, instructors focused on strategies that could be used to support the academic success of any student, and especially those who were experiencing academic struggle. They looked for methods to effectively communicate the knowledge of their discipline, without explicitly emphasizing how student identity might impact their choice of methods. Since these instructors believed all students can learn, they persisted in finding and using the techniques to make that learning happen. While instructors were generally aware of the academic challenges HUS might face, they did not adjust their teaching specifically for those populations. They may not have been cognizant of the ways in which their inclusive teaching supported students with marginalized identities. Alternatively, they might not have had the vocabulary to articulate their inclusive practices. They were simply engaging the strategies they thought were most likely to guide students to learning and academic success.

A question then arises: does an instructor need to explicitly center issues of identity and social justice to effectively support HUS when they are struggling academically, or is demonstrating genuine care for both teaching and learning enough? Some of theories I used to craft my initial framework stated that identity needs to be explicitly and intentionally centered in such pedagogy. Critical pedagogues like Kincheloe (2008) argued that centering identity is essential if we are to understand how and why people are oppressed and create conditions to relieve that oppression. After all, critical pedagogy originated in the Frankfurt School's critiques of classism (Darder et al.,

203

2017). Similarly, radical love scholars like Freire (1970) and Lane (2018) called for a politicized ethic of care that honors and elevates students' identities in the service of empowerment and social justice. Both critical pedagogy and radical love scholars center identity and social justice in the pursuit of supporting and empowering students with marginalized identities. Additionally, critical care pedagogy scholars emphasized understanding students' diverse backgrounds and intentionally connecting pedagogical strategies to their lives to create a pedagogy that advances social justice (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2018; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1997).

On the other hand, my model also incorporated Noddings' (2003, 2005) ethic of care, which promoted a more universal understanding of caring teaching. This caring teaching created inclusive spaces for all students to learn without explicitly centering one identity or another. Such pedagogy focused more on recognizing and honoring all students' humanity and seeking to create conditions for them to thrive (Noddings, 2005). My model also incorporated McNair et al.'s (2016) student-ready approach, which was created to benefit all students, with special emphasis on those who have been underserved. McNair et al. (2016) called for institutions to be "prepared for today's students, regardless of their backgrounds and academic strengths and challenges… [to] strategically and holistically advance student success" (p. 5). Recognizing institutional barriers to equity and empowerment was essential, but centering a specific identity was not (McNair et al., 2016). When faculty invested in their students to create conditions for success, these practices "lead to success of underserved students – and of all students" (McNair, 2016, para. 12). Noddings (2003, 2005) and McNair et al. (2016) did not

explicitly center identity and social justice in creating conditions for student success, unlike the scholars of critical pedagogy, radical love, or critical care pedagogy.

There is a common principle underlying all five theories incorporated in my model of SRCCP: instructors have a responsibility to create conditions of empowerment for students who are marginalized or ignored by the higher education system, so these students can achieve their goals and create the lives they want for themselves after graduation. This common purpose was also at the core of the practices enacted by the instructors in this study. If they demonstrated care for a student, then they effectively centered the student, whether consciously or not. Caring requires empathy, which involves centering another person's point of view. The instructors who were nominated for this study empowered their students to engage with learning, build their confidence, master their discipline, and apply knowledge in their lives after college. These strategies were enacted with the specific goal of helping students improve their situation in life, which could include the more immediate and short-term life goals of getting back on track academically or remedying a non-academic concern that was spilling over into academic life. The goal of helping students improve their situation in life also speaks to long-term outcomes of students persisting, graduating, securing the career they desire, and creating the life they want for themselves.

Although the instructors in this study may not have explicitly or consciously centered identity and social justice, the strategies they used to support their students' learning still resulted in conditions for empowerment, by Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. These are asset-based

205

conditions that adapt to students' needs and realities and therefore "make excellence

inclusive by supporting the success of all students" (McNair et al., 2016, p. 96).

The SRCCP model is driven by notions of care and empowerment. Instructors

who are aware of their students' identities and backgrounds serve those students better.

This is opposed to a colorblind approach in which instructors refuse to view themselves

or students as racial and cultural beings, ignoring how race shapes the human experience

(Suarez et al., 2019). A color-blind approach is a deficit-based perspective that

perpetuates marginalization and impedes student success (K. C. Booker et al., 2016;

Franklin et al., 2019; Mahoney, 2016; Suarez et al., 2019). Based on the findings of this

study, an asset-based approach incorporating the belief that all students can learn

appeared to be effective for supporting the academic success of these students, even if

identity was not explicitly centered. As relayed by students and instructors alike, care was

at the heart of instructor actions that support students who are struggling academically.

Caring-About Versus Caring-For

The findings in this study raised an important question about the type of care

enacted by instructors. In her 2003 book, Noddings described the difference between

caring-about and caring-for. For Noddings, the latter is the true meaning of care in

education. Noddings (2003) gave an example of the difference between caring-for and

caring-about:

> We can, in a sense… "care about" everyone, that is, we can maintain an internal
>
> state of readiness to try to care for whoever crosses our path. But this is different
>
> from the caring-for to which we refer when we use the word "caring"… [caring

206

for] refers to an actuality… [caring about] refers to a verbal commitment to the possibility of caring (p. 18).

To truly care for a student requires "engrossment, commitment, displacement of motivation" (Noddings, 2003, p. 112). However, Noddings (2003) also recognized that this sense of caring is an ideal that is not always attainable. "We cannot love everyone," she concluded. "So the one-caring acknowledges her finitude with both sadness and relief. She cannot do everything" (Noddings, 2003, p. 112). The instructors in this study acknowledged similar ideas. First, they recognized there are limits to what they can do to help students. This might be due to class size, or available time and resources. Some of these limits are intentional; for example, Ben mentioned he would never give out his cell phone number or students would be texting at all times of the day for help. Second, instructors spoke of student agency in following through on the support provided to them. Donna, Heather, and Ben referenced student agency, or, as Ben said, "I'm more than willing to help you, but meet me halfway." Instructors believed there were limits to how much time they could give, even if they wanted to do more. Interestingly, students were appreciative of any amount of time and attention they received. Students gave multiple examples of instructors making time for them. Alexis was a perfect example: while he spoke of limits on his time and energy, his nominator said "he always made time for us."

Caring-about is an instructor's commitment to the possibility of caring for a student and caring-for is when an instructor actually engages a student. Both were important to this model because both were important to students and instructors. For example, the key principle of Meet Students Where They Are is predicated on both.

207

Instructors had a caring mindset (caring about), which was a commitment to help all students find success. As Elijah said, it was an instructor's responsibility to create conditions for students to learn. But instructors also engaged directly in acts that manifested caring-for, such as consistently acknowledging and affirming students' contributions to discussion or connecting students to resources.

Students also valued both caring-about and caring-for. Students nominated instructors who they perceived as open to questions, approachable, accessible, and ready to help (caring-about). These instructors also provided feedback to students, actively connected material to students' lives, interacted with students on a personal level, and conducted proactive outreach (caring-for). While Noddings (2003) argued that caring-for was more valuable than caring-about, the findings in this study suggested that both forms of care were essential to supporting the academic success of students who are struggling.

This study clarified how instructor caring was an essential component of academic success. We must also consider if and how caring fits into the overall aims and practices of the institution, which I discuss next.

Implications for Practice

This study calls attention to specific actions instructors can take to help students attain academic success. The theoretical model created from this study, SRCCP, could be taught to instructors through workshops.

Specific Steps to Enact Support

The findings reveal a variety of concrete actions instructors can take to support the academic success of students who are struggling. Table 22 summarizes some of these.

208

Table 22. Suggested Actions to Support Student Academic Success

Course Design	Communication to Students	Professional Growth
Include a syllabus statement encouraging students to ask for help	Reach out to students who have stopped coming to class or submitting work	Strive to be patient, nonjudgmental, and empathetic
Incorporate principles of Universal Design for Learning	Explain to students what office hours are for and how to utilize them effectively	Read articles to become familiar with challenges facing today's college students
Alter the syllabus timeline to spend more time on difficult content as need arises	Help students see courses as learning opportunities connected to their lives after college	Seek faculty development opportunities related to diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice
Utilize examples that relate to students' lives	Vocalize to students that you are willing to help	Develop an understanding of campus resources
Offer deadline extensions and incomplete grades	Provide meaningful, constructive feedback	Learn to recognize unique forms of cultural wealth
Conduct knowledge checks throughout a class lesson	Learn students' names	Let your personality shine through
Give second chances	Validate students' efforts	Reflect on your own role models

The manageability of these actions depends upon the specifics of a course. For example, it might not be possible to learn the names of 200 students, but an instructor could ask a student their name when they raise a hand to contribute in class. Additionally, some of these actions take advanced planning, such as creating a list of resources, while others can happen in the moment, such as acknowledging students' responses or admitting when

a mistake has been made. Nevertheless, these actions have been demonstrated to support student academic success and can apply to multiple disciplines, course levels, and modes of instruction (Burke & Larmar, 2020; Castillo-Montoya, 2019; Nunn, 2019; Renzulli, 2015; Siliman, 2020).

The Challenge of Caring

The findings of this study underscore the importance and impact of instructor care. Instructors in this study built trust and created supportive environments where students were free to learn and take risks without shame. However, there are challenges to implementing care in the college classroom. Instructors might be reluctant or skeptical about demonstrating care for fear of "coddling" students (Miller & Mills, 2019). However, an ethic of care is not intended to lower academic standards, but rather, to provide students with the materials and resources they need to meet achievement standards – the main concept at the heart of a student-ready approach (Manning et al., 2014; McNair et al., 2016). Caring does take time. It can also be emotionally labor-intensive for instructors (Manning et al., 2014; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). This is particularly true for Women of Color and other instructors who share students' marginalized identities (M. M. Acosta, 2019; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Haynes et al., 2020).

Providing individualized support would be the pinnacle of instructor care, but this is not always possible. However, student participants in this study articulated that they still felt cared-for by instructors in large classes (70+ students) and in asynchronous online classes, two settings in which it might be more difficult to provide individualized

attention. The findings in this study suggest it is possible for care to be conveyed broadly and still have a positive impact on individual students. This can be accomplished through actions like including a syllabus statement encouraging students to ask for help, or intentionally incorporating examples that are relevant to students' lives.

Creating Faculty/Instructor Development Programs

One of the key themes in this study was Meet Them Where They Are. While this theme was created in reference to student success, it may also be applicable to instructor success. Instructors may or may not have previously studied pedagogical approaches. For example, only two of the six instructors I interviewed mentioned formally studying topics around inclusive teaching and student success. Chase participated in pedagogical training required by his department, while Donna intentionally sought out some of the workshops from the university's teaching institute. Yet the other four instructors were still nominated for their ability to support student success. They learned their strategies through trial-and-error or watching mentors teach.

To prepare instructors for the shift to SRCCP, institutions can create faculty development programs that specifically address the skills and competencies needed to create inclusive environments. These programs need to address both the cognitive and affective domain (Iseminger & McClure, 2020), as well as instructional, personal, and organizational elements (Page et al., 2014). Faculty development begins with helping individuals move past the colorblind approach in order to identify and address their own biases about students from diverse backgrounds, as these greatly impact their interactions

211

with students, their approaches to teaching, and their beliefs that all students can learn (Franklin, 2016; McNair et al., 2016; Mills, 2020).

Unfortunately, this type of pedagogy and commitment to teaching might not be valued in an instructor's discipline. Some instructors, departments, and/or disciplines may be more likely to view diversity and inclusion as add-ons or distractions from the real course material (Booker at al., 2016). Instructional developers may want to consider how to make SRCCP more accessible for specific university departments. For example, it might be assumed that STEM faculty would be less likely to view SRCCP as relevant to their curriculum and teaching, or they might not know how to implement it even if they were interested (Harper, 2010; Herman et al, 2018). Instructional developers could focus on high-impact practices that do not take much effort (Horowitz, 2019). One easy way for STEM instructors to do this is to use real-world examples from students' everyday lives when creating homework assignments, writing test problems, etc. Context-rich problem solving can be highly effective for improving student learning outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). Continually connecting to previous material is not limited to previous course material – it can also include connecting to students' prior experiences outside of the classroom. However, if instructors do not feel supported by their department or their institution, they may be less inclined to invest the time and effort needed to create inclusive, student-centered learning environments (K. C. Booker et al., 2016; Herman et al., 2018). Faculty participation in development programs like these needs to be incentivized and supported by university leadership (Delima, 2019) and inclusive of

lecturers, graduate teaching assistants, and staff who also have responsibility for instruction.

Realigning the Mission and Vision for Land-Grants

As discussed in chapter two, Land-Grants are public universities created to serve the needs of the state through the three-part mission of scholarship, teaching, and service (Croft, 2019). At the heart of the 1862 Land-Grant mission is the promotion of "the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life" (7 U.S.C. 301 et seq.). Yet throughout their history, 1862 Land-Grants have struggled to recruit, retain, and graduate students from the populations these institutions are intended to serve (Behle, 2013; Franklin et al., 2019; Gelber, 2013; Sternberg, 2014). A number of factors contribute to this struggle, including affordability, campus climate, and increased pressure to maintain institutional rankings (C. B. Anderson & Steele, 2016; Franklin et al., 2019; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018).

How does this study contribute to the premise of Land-Grant institutions? Some of the findings in this study suggest that teaching might not be broadly valued as a priority component of the tripartite mission of Ohio State. If retention and attainment are institutional goals – particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds – then current practices need to change. The findings in this study suggest students who are struggling need instructors who value and prioritize teaching. This idea was perhaps most truthfully captured by the student who said:

> I feel like that's why college students are stressed out and they're [saying] 'I'm going to drop out,' … because of these instructors. It feels like they don't care

about you. And I don't know if they're here for a paycheck or research or

whatnot, but that's oftentimes how it feels.

Students believed the instructors they nominated wanted to teach, in comparison to other

instructors they have encountered at the university.

Additionally, Ben, Chase, Elijah, and Heather all talked about competing

institutional priorities of research and teaching. Elijah expressed how his role as a lecturer

emphasized teaching, compared to tenure-track faculty in the department who were

expected to prioritize research. Chase also felt lecturers had more freedom to care about

student success when compared to tenure-track faculty. Ben saw a clear delineation in his

department between instructors who value teaching and those who value research.

Heather talked about this as well, remarking on how little teaching counts in the tenure

review process. In fact, early in her career, pre-tenure, she won a department teaching

award and was scared to accept it for fear it would hurt her tenure process. She was

approached by another tenured faculty member in the department who told her she was

the first pre-tenure faculty member to receive the award in recent memory, hinting that

there could be implications regarding her priorities. Heather did not want to be seen as

someone who channeled her time into teaching instead of researching. Her department

mentor eventually convinced her to accept the award, but she became hypervigilant about

how she might be perceived by her colleagues.

Indeed, scholars have cautioned that teaching excellence is diminished at Land-

Grant institutions because the faculty tenure and reward system does not value it as much

as other measures (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Page et al., 2014). The support strategies

identified in this study must be recognized and rewarded to make it possible for tenure-track instructors to use SRCCP principles. This could include a rebalancing of responsibilities to allow more time for course preparation, rewarding instructors who participate in professional development, providing financial incentives, or even including perceived care as a component of teacher evaluations.

On the other hand, lecturers – whose positions revolve around teaching responsibilities – may also perceive that effective teaching is unrewarded, particularly because they are paid less than their tenure-track counterparts and are not primary decision-makers for establishing department and institutional priorities (Dawson et al., 2020). To broadly adopt an inclusive pedagogy like SRCCP, institutions may need to change department cultures and tenure expectations. This would be a large project that could only be tackled via shared governance. So much of the culture of teaching and learning is deeply entrenched in higher education, perhaps making it seem impossible to change, but it can be done. For example, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign transformed the teaching culture in its introductory STEM courses by adopting the adage "teach like you do research" to engage faculty in evidence-based teaching practices and course reform (Herman et al., 2018).

To be true to the Land-Grant mission, faculty need to understand and believe "that students are the reason they are here and they build the pieces of their career… around students" (Page et al., 2014, p. 25). Based on student and instructor contributions to this study, lecturers and graduate teaching assistants have more leeway to do this. While it is true that at a large Land-Grant like Ohio State, many introductory-level classes are taught

by lecturers or TAs, students can and do encounter tenure-track faculty instructors early in their education. This perhaps suggests that all types of instructors have the potential to positively (or negatively) impact academic success during the important transition time of a student's first two years, when they are making decisions about majors, career goals, or even whether to stay enrolled in college. Regardless of rewards or incentives, the instructors in this study are finding ways to prioritize teaching and student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This exploratory case study provides direction for future research by scholars of higher education and/or teaching and learning. The findings led to both limitations that need to be considered and new questions that need to be explored. I offer two suggestions for each of these new directions.

Limitation to Consider: What is the Scope of This Model?

This study focused on historically underrepresented students who experienced academic struggle. Yet the SRCCP model could potentially be relevant to students from other populations. This could include students from who are not experiencing academic struggle, or those with identities that were not the focus of the study. After all, the theoretical foundations of this study drew on work conducted on students from marginalized and majority backgrounds (e.g. Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2002; hooks, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lane, 2018; Noddings, 2003, 2005). The scope could also include examining the role of different learning formats. For example, previous research indicated that caring pedagogy is even more important in online learning, because students in that setting can feel disempowered and anonymous (Adams & Rose, 2014;

216

Mehta & Aguilera, 2020). In addition, the scope should be expanded beyond Land-Grant institutions to include smaller regional institutions, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges, among others.

Limitation to Consider: In What Settings Does Identity Matter?

As previously described, students and instructors in this study did not seem to view identity as an important factor in supporting student academic success. Future research might explore whether there is more to this finding, as the literature reviewed for this study suggested that identity does matter (e.g., Azmitia et al., 2018; Castillo-Montoya, 2019; Guthrie et al., 2013; Means & Pyne, 2017; Nguyen & Herron, 2021; Strayhorn, 2012; Tobolowsky et al., 2020; Williams & Martin, 2021). Perhaps a new study with a larger sample size would yield different conclusions. It is also worth considering whether there are specific settings in which identity does matter for academic support, for example, across different disciplines. A more intentional, intersectional approach could also be used to explore whether there is greater impact when students and/or instructors represent specific combinations of identities. Future research should look at interactions between students and instructors of different identities to explore this nuance.

New Question to Explore: What Behaviors are Not Supportive?

I asked students to nominate instructors who they felt supported their success. In the questionnaire responses and interviews, students named specific instructor behaviors and dispositions that conveyed support. However, even though I did not solicit this information, students also referenced specific instructors they felt were not supportive.

Some of this is captured in the theme Didn't Make Me Feel Dumb. A future study should ask students about their experiences with instructors who they felt inhibited their success. Those dispositions and behaviors could be compared to the results of this study to further solidify the theoretical model.

New Question to Explore: What Outcomes Can We Measure?

Much of the scholarship of teaching and learning focuses on students' perceptions and beliefs, but not on measurable outcomes (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012). Future research should explore outcomes such as improvement in self-regulated learning behaviors, grades and test scores, retention rates, and career opportunities post-graduation. Classroom interventions could also be deployed and assessed (Caruth, 2018). Additionally, it is worth exploring the weight of emotional labor for instructors, as measured by both professional and personal outcomes, such as emotional burnout, physical fatigue, or changes in pedagogical approaches to establish different boundaries.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter was to consider the study findings within the context of the larger body of literature around student success. I uncovered three major themes that made up the phenomenon of enacting care for students who are struggling academically: Creating a Culture of Learning, Demonstrating Care, and Meeting Students Where They Are. I explained how these findings challenged some assumptions I had made based on previous research. I presented a detailed model of Student-Ready Critical Care Pedagogy or SRCCP. I also made several suggestions for practice and future research.

In their discussion of engaged Land-Grants universities, Gavazzi and Gee (2018) called for institutions to qualify what excellent teaching looks like and what excellent teachers do. This case study contributed to the body of knowledge on excellent teaching. There are instructors in varying roles and departments across the university who are making a difference for student success. Their care for students is essential (e.g. Ezarik, 2022a). While it is important to have broad institutional goals and aspirations for empowering students to achieve success, the individual change we can make within our own spheres of influence matters too and can be done more quickly (Flessner et al., 2007). Instructors' everyday enactments of care can make such a difference for students.

I end this study with a quote from one of the 14 student participants. This student expressed great interest in my study and asked several questions about my purpose and intentions. In turn, I asked her what it meant to have an opportunity to participate in my research. She said:

> Being able to participate in this research project has given me a voice and allowed me to share my thoughts and experiences. I hope to see a positive change in the way instructors teach, interact, and inspire students and this research shows how they can do that… I know I have never forgotten a good teacher, but just as importantly, I have never forgotten a bad teacher as well… This research puts all the pivotal information together to prove that instructors have a significant impact on the students they teach.

Quality, inclusive teaching matters. It is at the heart of the Land-Grant mission, and it is a standard we can continually strive to reach.

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Appendix A. Phase One Recruitment Email Script

Subject: Help with my dissertation research – nominate an instructor who has made a difference

Hello [Name],

I need your help! I am conducting my Ph.D. dissertation research study. I want to learn more about what college instructors do to support the academic success of their students who have experienced academic struggles. I am hoping you can nominate an instructor to participate in my study.

Your participation in this first phase of my study will involve completing a Qualtrics questionnaire. I estimate it will take you 10-15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. You will be asked to nominate an Ohio State instructor (professor, TA, staff, lecturer, etc.) who you believe supports your academic success. This could be a past or present instructor. You will also be asked to share some details about how you define academic success and why you nominated this instructor.

The information you provide matters. It will help me identify instructors I can invite to participate in phase two of my study, where I will observe and interview them to learn more about their specific actions that support student academic success. You are in the best position to tell me firsthand who I should consider.

Students who complete the questionnaire will be entered into a random drawing to receive a $15 Visa gift card. The odds of winning are approximately 1 in 29 or 3.4%.

If you would like to participate, please click [this link] to proceed to the questionnaire.

Thank you so much for your help. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number listed below.

Student Questionnaire Prompts

Page 1 (after the student signs the consent form)
(a) what is your preferred first name?
(b) What is your last name.#?
(c) Do you personally identify with any of the following groups? Select all that apply:
First-generation student   Low-income student   Student of Color
          None of these
(d) How do you define academic success?

Page 2
For the purposes of this study, an "instructor" is anyone who teaches a credit-bearing course at Ohio State. This can include: faculty, graduate TAs, lecturers, lab assistants, academic advisors and other staff, etc.
A credit-bearing course is an academic course offered by a specific department, such as CHEM 1220 or ENGLISH 1110. It does not include workshops or presentations.
(Please name one instructor (or more) at Ohio State who you believe has supported your academic success. Provide as much detail as you can, such as:

- Instructor's name
- The course you took with them (or are currently taking)
- When you took the course

Note: Success Program instructors are not eligible for nomination to avoid a conflict of interest.
(a) **Instructor name**
(b) **Course department (examples: ENGLISH, CHEM)**
(c) **Course number (examples: 1110, 1220)**
(d) **Semester and year when you took the course**
(e) From the following drop-down boxes, please supply as much information as you know about this course.
Was this a lecture;
          lab;
          recitation;
          don't know/unsure
Was this a General Education (GE) course;
          Not a GE course;
          Don't know/unsure
Was this a major course;
          minor course;

258

elective course that does not count for major or minor;
don't know/unsure

Please select the length of the course:
full semester
Session 1 (autumn/spring)
Session 2 (autumn/spring)
4 week session 1 (summer)
4 week session 2 (summer)
4 week session 3 (summer)
6 week session 1 (summer)
6 week session 2 (summer)
8 week session 1 (summer)
8 week session 2 (summer)

Did you take this course in Spring Semester 2020?
Yes
No
IF YES: <u>When this class</u> <u>began</u> in 2020, was this a Fully in-person course;
hybrid course (some components in-person, some components online);
fully online course;
don't know/unsure
If fully online: asynchronous; synchronous with live login; don't know/unsure

IF NO: When this class began in January2020, was this a Fully in-person course;
hybrid course (some components in-person, some components online);
fully online course;
don't know/unsure
If fully online: asynchronous; synchronous with live login; don't know/unsure

Page 3
(a) Tell me why you nominated this instructor, including how they supported your academic success. Please provide as much detail as you can.

Page 4
What's next? Amy will review nominations and select instructors to interview for the second phase of her study. If the instructor you nominated is selected for this study, you will receive a follow-up invitation via email to participate in a virtual interview where you can share more information about your experience with the instructor.
All questionnaire participants will be entered into a random drawing to receive a $15 Visa gift card. The gift card drawing will take place after the questionnaire submission deadline. All participants will be notified by email as to whether or not they won a gift card.
Thank you for completing this questionnaire, your help is greatly appreciated. Click the arrow button below to submit your response.

Appendix C. Phase Two Recruitment Email Script

Subject: Help with my dissertation research – participate in an interview

Hello [Name],

As you know, I am conducting my Ph.D. dissertation research study. I want to learn more about what college instructors do to support the academic success of their students who have experienced academic struggles. You recently nominated an instructor who you believe supported your academic success. I would like the opportunity to interview you to learn more about your experiences with this instructor and how they supported your academic success.

Your participation in this first phase of my study will involve completing one interview on Zoom. I estimate it will take you 25-30 minutes to complete this interview. You will be asked to tell me more about why you nominated this instructor, including the specific actions the instructor took to support your academic success and how these actions helped you.

The information you provide matters. It will help me understand the specific actions instructors take that support student academic success. You are in the best position to tell me firsthand what this experience is like.

Students who participate will receive a $15 Visa gift card.

Thank you so much for your help. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number listed below.

<u>Student Interview Protocol</u>

Date and time: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

<u>Introductory protocol</u>

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to record our Zoom session today. Please review and sign the consent form [put link in chat]. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to today's recording, which will eventually be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed. Essentially, the consent form states that: (1) all information will be held confidential; (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable; and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last approximately 25-30 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

<u>Interview</u>

You have been asked to speak with me today because you nominated an instructor whom you believe supported your academic success. I would like to know more about the specific actions the instructor took and how they impacted you.

A. I'll start by collecting some background information. Although I know you personally, let's review this information quickly so I have it on record.
   a. What is your major? Minor, if you have one?
   b. When did you start at Ohio State?
   c. When did you complete the summer program?
   d. You nominated _____ who was your instructor for _____ during _____ semester, is that correct?

B. Let me collect some information so I understand the context. Tell me a little bit about _____ semester. What was going on in your world?
   a. Probes: academics, personal life, social life, work, family life, etc.

C. Tell me about ____ [instructor name].
   a. What were your impressions of this instructor?
   b. What kind of relationship did you have? How was that relationship established?
   c. How did your instructor demonstrate caring, if they did at all?

D. Tell me why you nominated ____.
   a. How did they impact your academic success?
   b. Can you describe a specific situation or scenario that you remember?
   c. Can you describe specific actions taken by this instructor?

   d. Probe for more details
E. What makes _____ [instructor name] similar to or different from other instructors at Ohio State?
F. In general, how do you know when an instructor supports your academic success?
G. Is there anything else I should know about that I didn't ask you?

Appendix E. Phase Three Recruitment Email Script

Subject: Research study on instructors who support the academic success of historically underrepresented students

Hello [Name],

I am reaching out for help with my Ph.D. dissertation research study. I want to learn more about what college instructors do to support the academic success of their historically underrepresented students (first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color) who have experienced academic struggles. **You were specifically nominated by a student as an instructor who personally supported their academic success during a time when they were struggling academically.**

My data collection methods consist of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Your participation in my study will involve up to two interviews on Zoom. Each interview should take 45-60 minutes. I would also like to observe your teaching in 1 session of a class to see you "in action" and gather insight into your classroom atmosphere and how you interact with students. Lastly, I will ask to view documents that can further illuminate your approach to teaching. These might include lesson plans, course announcements, or syllabi. To facilitate this, I would ask to be added to your Carmen site in the role of "Designer," which allows me to view the content of the site but not student responses or data.

The information you provide matters. The academic success of historically underrepresented students is an institutional priority. Instructors can make a significant positive impact for these students when they are struggling academically. You are in the best position to tell me firsthand what you do and why it matters.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to this email. I will reach out to you about setting up the initial interview.

Thank you so much for your help. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number listed below.

<u>Instructor Interview Protocol – First Interview</u>

Date and time: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

<u>Introductory protocol</u>

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to record our Zoom session today. Please review and sign the consent form [put link in chat]. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to today's recording, which will eventually be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed. Essentially, the consent form states that: (1) all information will be held confidential; (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable; and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last approximately 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

<u>Interview</u>

The purpose of my research study is to explore the actions that instructors take to support the academic success of historically underrepresented students, specifically first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color. You have been asked to speak with me today because you were specifically nominated by a student as someone who supported their academic success. I would like to learn more about you and your approach to teaching.

    A. Let's start with some background information.
        a. What is your current role at the university?
        b. [If the instructor was nominated for a previous course] The student who nominated you took one of your classes in _____ semester. What was your role at the university at that time?
        c. What types of courses do you teach/have you taught at Ohio State?
            i. Probe for: GE/not GE; major/minor/elective; fully in-person, hybrid, fully online; etc.
    B. Talk to me about your teaching.
        a. If I were to sit in on one of your classes, what are some things I would notice about your teaching?
        b. What are some elements of your teaching philosophy/approach to teaching?
            i. How does care play a role in your teaching, if it does at all?
        c. How do you prepare to teach?
        d. How do you typically interact with students?

       i. Probe for: relationships, communication, formality; mechanisms for communication, e.g. Carmen messages, email, office hours, meetings; how interaction is typically initiated

C. How do you define academic success?
   a. What does academic success look like in your classroom? At Ohio State?
   b. Why do you define academic success this way? How did you come to develop this definition?

D. How do you know when a student is struggling academically?

E. Tell me about a time when you helped a student who was struggling academically.
   a. Probe for details

F. The focus of my study is on the academic success of historically underrepresented student groups. To make sure we are on the same page, I want to quickly review the concept of "historically underrepresented student." These are groups for whom the proportion of students who share that identity at the university is smaller than the proportion of people who share that identity in the total US population. In this study, I am focusing on 3 groups:
   a. first-generation students, for whom neither parent has a baccalaureate degree;
   b. low-income students, which is a student whose family income level qualifies them to receive a federal Pell Grant because of demonstrated financial need;
   c. Students of Color, who are domestic students who identify with one or more of the following groups: African American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
   d. Do you have questions about any of these groups?

G. Talk to me about your experiences with this student population.
   a. Have you ever known that you had one of these students in your class? How did you know?
   b. If you were aware that a student with one or more of these identities is in your class, how did this impact your teaching?
   c. What do you think are some of the barriers to success that these students might face?
   d. If you're comfortable telling me, do you identify with any of the groups that I mentioned?

H. What are some things instructors can do to support student academic success?

I. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

<u>Instructor Interview Protocol – Second Interview</u>

Date and time: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

<u>Introductory protocol</u>

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to record our Zoom session today. Thank you for making the time to speak with me for a second interview. You already signed the consent form, but just as a reminder, (1) all information will be held confidential; (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable; and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last approximately 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

<u>Interview</u>

As a reminder, the purpose of my research study is to explore the actions that instructors take to support the academic success of historically underrepresented students, specifically first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color. I initially invited you to participate in this study because you were specifically nominated by a student as someone who supported their academic success.

A. I observed your _____ [class] on _____. Is that correct? As a refresher that day, you covered topics like _____ [refer to general topics recorded on observation protocol sheet]. Talk to me about that class session.
    a. How did you prepare?
    b. What was the goal of that class session?
    c. How do you feel that class session went? Was it similar to other class sessions in this course?
    d. During this class session, I noticed _____. Tell me more about that. [Share some observations I made, such as: specific instructor-student interactions, general classroom tone/atmosphere, comments made in class, specific instructor or student behaviors, how the instructor responded if a student was struggling].
    e. When you think back on that class session, do you think there were specific actions you took that supported student academic success, whether you were conscious of them or not? What were those actions?
        i. If the instructor cannot give an example, I will name one based on data I collected during my observation. Did you know this is an example of an action that supports student academic success?
    f. How do you know when a student is struggling academically in that class?

g. Are there other things you think I should know about that class session?
B. For this study, I also asked you to share with me some of your documents so I could gain some more insight into your experiences as an instructor. You shared with me _____ [list documents].
   a. Follow-up prompts about specific documents and their content, such as: How did this document come into being? What is the purpose of this document? How do students respond to this document?
C. When you design your course materials, create your lesson plans, and teach in the classroom, how does student academic success factor into all of this, if at all?
   a. How do students from historically underrepresented populations factor into all of this, if at all? As a reminder, this refers to students who are first-generation, low-income, and/or Students of Color.
   b. Is there anything you would or will do differently to support the academic success of historically underrepresented students?
D. As we wrap up the interview, please tell me the 2 or 3 main points you want me to take away from my experience interviewing you and observing your teaching.
E. Is there anything else that you want to tell me?

Observation Protocol
Portions of this protocol were adapted from Washington (2020)

Date/Time of Observation: _____

Location of Observation: _____

Participants Involved in Observation: _____

Purpose of Observation: _____

Descriptive Notes:

1. Physical space: describe and sketch the setting.

2. Participants: Who are they? What are their perceived identities? What are their roles? What are they doing? How do people interact? How many people are there?

3. Outline a tentative agenda for the class:

4. Activities: What activities are going on? Who is involved?

5. Instructor actions: What verbal cues do they engage? Physical cues? Where do they stand? What questions do they ask? What pedagogical tools do they use?

6. Instructor interactions: How do they interact with students? How do they respond to students? How do they try to involve students in the learning process?

7. Relational interactions: how many times does the instructor ask for student contributions? How many times do students interact directly with the instructor?

8. Subtle factors: What symbols are apparent? What is the mood in the space? Are there indicators of identity within the environment?

9. My behavior: How do I react to the environment? How am I feeling within this space?

10. General thoughts/Overall impressions: