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The Experiences of Minoritized Students in a College Success Course: A Qualitative Case Study

Erin Hannah
Rowan University

THE EXPERIENCES OF MINORITIZED STUDENTS IN A COLLEGE SUCCESS COURSE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Erin Hannah

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Dissertation Chair: MaryBeth Walpole, Ph.D., Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research

Committee Members:
Carmelo Callueng, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Wellness & Inclusive Services in Education
Lisa Vernon-Dotson, Ph.D., Dean, Dwight Schar College of Education, Ashland University

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family, friends, and colleagues. An extra special thank you to my dad for always believing in me, and my two Stevies for their inspiration.

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The pursuit of my doctoral degree has been one of the most challenging endeavors I've ever attempted. Luckily, I have been surrounded by people who have often believed in me more than I have believed in myself. I would like to credit my committee chair for challenging me more than I've ever experienced, while still believing in my ability to persevere to see this to completion. To my committee, Dr. Camelo Callueng and Dr. Lisa Vernon-Dotson, thank you for serving on my committee. Your expertise and guidance have meant a great deal to me through this journey. I appreciate your time and dedication.

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Abstract

Erin Hannah
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Mary Beth Walpole, Ph.D.
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Enrollment in higher education has increased over recent years with more students entering college underprepared for the academic rigor. Through expanded access, more minoritized students who are Pell eligible are enrolling. To retain these and other students, higher education institutions are implementing high impact practices to provide additional support. One such strategy is through the implementation of college success courses. These courses are intended to provide an extra layer of support for students as they make the transition from high school to college. Using a qualitative, case study approach, I used semi-structured interviews which included a photo-elicitation component to explore the experiences of minoritized, Pell eligible students in a college success course at Suburban University. Three themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews including the importance of faculty, learning about resources, and self-motivation. During the photo-elicitation portion of the interviews, the importance of relationships was a reoccurring theme. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The transition from high school to college is a time of significant change in a student's social and academic life, as well as a shift to an entirely new environment (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). This time of transition can be an exciting time of substantial growth, but can also lead students to experience self-doubt, as well as stress, anxiety, and depression (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Leary & DeRosier, 2012). A student's ability to cope with these stressors, as well as their response to the support provided, is instrumental in their overall well-being, and contributes to their academic success and persistence (Andrews & Wilding, 2004). Universities are constantly searching for impactful interventions to assist students in navigating these new expectations (Greenfield, et al., 2013; Schreiner, et al., 2012; Wood & Breyer, 2016), and have a long history of student support programs to assist with a smooth transition.

After World War II, there was an expansion of higher education institutions, which included additional community and technical colleges, as well as continued growth of the state systems of education (Greenfield, 2013). The implementation of the federally funded access program called The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, referred to as the GI Bill, expanded access to higher education, specifically for veterans (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Although the GI Bill led to access for veterans, segregation laws still prevented equal access to minoritized students (Smith, 2020). Yet, the passing of this bill led to the doubling of higher education enrollment in the six years following the war (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), which led many Americans to see that college was no longer just for the wealthy elite (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Smith 2020).

World War II was a catalyst for the civil rights movement, as Black people began to demand equal rights under the law (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The civil rights movement again expanded access to higher education, as did The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and continued the diversification of higher education (Kimbark, et al., 2017; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Through these programs, students from low-income households, women, first-generation college students, as well as racially diverse students gained access to higher education. While these programs did provide access, they did not resolve the complex issues surrounding racial and economic disparities once students arrived on campus. While increased access was a positive result of these programs, these diverse student populations still faced tremendous obstacles in the pursuit of their education.

In more recent years, the creation of for-profit and online only institutions has continued to change the landscape of higher education, increasing and diversifying the population of students with access to a baccalaureate degree even further (Greenfield, et al., 2013). Greater access to higher education led to a change in the academic profile of students, with more students beginning their college careers without the needed skills for success (Coleman et al., 2017).

Beyond academic preparation, the characteristics, and responsibilities of today's college student stray far outside the demands faced by college students decades ago. Students today are often required to work full or part-time jobs, share responsibility for the caregiving of family members, and encounter societal pressures that were not present as early as twenty years ago (Engle, 2007; Stovall, 2000). Students enrolling in higher

education today are increasingly diverse in regard to social background, age, educational experience, and race, and the expectations of the college experience and this complexity and intersectionality can make the transition from high school to college difficult (Coleman, et al., 2018; Engle, 2007; Stovall, 2000; Stuart, et. al., 2015). Issues of college readiness are not isolated to one group or characteristic but are evident even in students who could be assumed to ready based on high school GPA or SAT scores (Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011).

For Black students, the ability to transition to higher education and continue through graduation goes well beyond academic preparation (Gulffrida & Douthit, 2010). Sociocultural challenges, specifically at predominately White Institutions (PWIs), including relationships with faculty, friends, and family, lead to challenges not faced by their White peers (Gulffrida & Douthit, 2010). Research has shown that relationships with faculty are vitally important to student success, however this is more challenging for Black students when faculty are primarily White (DeFour & Hirsch, 2002). Furthermore, the stress of paying for college impacts Black students at a greater intensity than White students (Grable & Joo, 2006; Heckman et al. 2016; Montalto, 2014).

Latinx students are part of the largest minoritized group in the United States, but only 12% of students enrolled in higher education are Latinx (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Furthermore, Latinx students are disproportionately enrolled in Hispanic-serving, less selective, and two-year institutions (Thomas & Perna, 2004). Similar to their Black counterparts, Latinx students are arriving on campus with different sociocultural capital (Strayhorm, 2008). These students are more likely to experience feelings of isolation,

have family responsibilities that infringe upon their academics, and can experience negative stereotypes and discrimination (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Ortiz, 2004).

Like race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status has also been shown to contribute to student persistence. At public four-year institutions, students who received Pell Grants had a six-year graduation rate of 51%, while non-Pell students graduated at 65% (The Education Trust, 2015). More than three-quarters of Pell Grant recipients come from families earning $40,000 or less, half were older than 24 years, and they were more likely to be first-generation and people of color (Whistle & Hiler, 2018).

First-generation college students often have overlapping identities with those mentioned above; they are frequently minoritized students or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Institutions have different definitions for first-generation students. Some consider first-generation students those whose parents did not attend college at all; others consider first-generation students those whose parents may have attended college but did not graduate. For this study, the second definition will be used. Using this definition, 56% of undergraduate students enrolled in four-year public institutions in academic year 2015-2016 were first-generation (NASPA, 2019). When comparing income levels between first-generation students and their continuing education peers, the median parental income for first-generation families was $41,000 compared to $90,000 for continuing generation students (NASPA, 2019). This reflects the intersection of identities for many students. While persistence rates are similar between first-generation and continuing education students after their first year of enrollment, 86% compared to 82% a significant difference surfaces in the six-year graduation rates, with continuing education students graduating at a rate of 49% and first-

generation students graduating at 20% (NASPA, 2019). So clearly there are structural and cultural barriers that impede college enrollment for minoritized students exist (Espinosa & Mitchell, 2020). Many of these barriers were constructed many years ago, but higher education has failed to rectify them (Espinosa & Mitchell, 2020).

While these issues have not been rectified, student persistence and retention have long been concerns for higher education institutions (Flanders, 2015; Hossler, 2006; Raab & Adam, 2005). One reason for the focus on retention rates is because of the financial ramifications when students do not persist (Hossler, 2006; Kirp, 2019). For the students themselves, earning a college degree can lead to higher weekly and lifetime earnings while lowering chances of unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In the same realm, those who earn a Bachelor's degree experience more personal and professional mobility and feel more job satisfaction than those without a bachelor's degree (McMahon, 2009). Furthermore, students with a college degree are more equipped to meet the needs of the future global economy (Habley, et. al., 2012). In contrast, students who begin college but do not earn a degree can be burdened with large school loans without the employment to support the payments (Kirp, 2019; McMahon, 2009). Students who begin college and do not graduate are more likely to default on their student loans and are almost twice as likely to be unemployed than those who obtain their degrees (Kirp, 2019).

While student retention impacts students financially, it also has consequences for the institutions. In general, public institutions have been receiving progressively less financial support from states, increasing dependence on tuition dollars, while private institutions have typically relied more heavily on tuition income (Habley, et al., 2012;

Hossler, 2006). If they do not retain students, institutions have to continually recruit and onboard new students, which can be a costly endeavor. Moreover, the U.S. News and World Report for Best Colleges in America uses graduation rates as one measure of quality in their ratings (Hossler, 2006). These ratings can be influential for students and parents in the college decision making process, and therefore influence incoming student enrollment and tuition dollars indirectly (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Diamond, 2012; Hossler, 2006).

Higher education institutions have implemented practices and programs in an attempt to support and retain students. These include study skills workshops, tutoring, academic advising, and others (Bowering, et al., 2017). These intervention strategies have a modest effect on student success in college by addressing academic deficiencies, but may not have the longer-term effects of other practices (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Institutions have implemented more high impact practices and programs to support and retain students, particularly first-year students, as more than half of attrition occurs in a student's first year (Greenfield et al., 2013, Deberard, et al., 2004). These practices include summer bridge programs, learning communities, early alert programs, and college success courses, among others (Bowering, et al., 2017). College success courses (CSC), the focus of this dissertation, have been designed to ease students' transition to college by providing them with an understanding of how college differs from high school, to assist in building the skills needed to be successful throughout their college careers, and to aid in the transition to college (Kimbark, et al., 2017).

College success courses have been one of the more popular high impact practices being implemented, as research has shown that they have a positive impact on first year

to second-year persistence as well as student engagement (Bai & Pan, 2009; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; NSFYS, 2016). Students' success during their first semester in college is a significant predictor of graduation, so most institutions focus many of their efforts on this cohort of students (Shugart, et al., 2008; US Department of Education, 2000). While college success courses have a positive impact on retention, a wide variety of implementation strategies are employed (Kimbark, et, al., 2016; Stovall, 2000; Tinto, 2012). Each institution determines how many credits will be awarded for course completion; typically, college success courses are two to three credits (Hatch et al, 2014; Hoops, et al., 2015; Kimbark, et al., 2016; Stovall, 2000). Other implementation factors that tend to vary are class size, instructors, instructor training, and which students are enrolled in the course (Hatch, et al., 2014; Hoops, et al., 2015; Stovall, 2000).

One specific campus, Suburban University, a four-year institution located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States began offering a college success course in fall 2014. However, Suburban has yet to do a thorough assessment of the program, its implementation, and the extent to which it assists first-time, full-time students in their transition to college, if at all. In response, this dissertation examines the college success course at Suburban University. Once completed, this study will provide insight into the contribution the course, Suburban 101 has on a first-year student's transition to college.

Purpose and Overview

Students' success during their first semester in college has been shown to be a significant predictor of graduation (Shugart, et al., 2008). Student persistence through graduation is important for both higher education institutions and the students enrolled. To support and retain today's complex college students, institutions across the country

have created and implemented CSCs to ease the difficult transition from high school to college (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Kimbark, et al., 2017).

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) examines a group of students at Suburban University who are traditional aged, first-year, full-time Black and Latinx as well as Pell-eligible, aged 18-24, who participated in a college success course called Suburban 101 during their first semester at Suburban University. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of Black and Latinx as well as Pell-eligible students enrolled in Suburban 101, and how it contributed to their transition to college. More specifically, this study aims to explore the impact, if any, the CSC has on student academic and social transition to college, as well as their motivation to persist. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with photo-elicitation embedded within the interviews (Stake, 1995).

The Suburban 101 course is designed to provide an additional layer of support for students who are enrolling underprepared for the rigorous demands of higher education. While initially offered to very small populations of students at Suburban University, the course is currently being offered more widely, including students who enter the University without a chosen major, and for students who enter through Suburban 101's program for low-income and first-generation college students. The college success course at Suburban University has multiple targeted learning outcomes for the students enrolled.

What is currently unknown is the effect Suburban 101 is having on the student transition; this study will be helpful in gaining an understanding of its impact.

The learning outcomes described through the course syllabus include:

1) Articulate the meaning and value of being a member of the University community;

2) Describe personal interests, values, and skills as related to education and career;

3) Understand the academic differences between high school and college and build academic skills to support success;

4) Be familiar with campus resources and materials and how to use them to achieve academic and personal success in college;

5) Develop short- and long-term personal goals to guide plans for academic and professional success;

6) Build skills and knowledge for finding and using appropriate library and information sources for college level work;

7) Develop an understanding of self and others in a diverse world and diverse campus.

The role of the CSC in student transition is worth studying because the institution allocates significant resources to offer the course. According to institutional documents fifty-five sections of Suburban 101 were being offered for new freshmen during the fall 2021 semester. Resources allocated by the university include the cost to pay the instructors, as well as the time of the staff members to present various topics to sections of the course. It is also important to recognize that students are paying to take this course, so it is the ethical responsibility of the University to evaluate the course.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study is *what are the experiences of first-year, full-time Black, Latinx, and Pell-eligible college students enrolled in Suburban 101?,* There are three sub-questions that will help answer this question. They include:

1. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to social transition?
2. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to academic transition?
3. What contributions, if any, does enrollment in Suburban 101 have on motivation to remain enrolled?

Significance of the Study

Many first-year students across the country are enrolled in a college success course as part of their initial enrollment. According to a 2009 National Survey conducted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 87.3% of the 1,1019 two and four-year institutions offered some form of a college success course. While current research suggests that college success courses have a positive impact on student retention and social integration, the variability in course implementation including the number of credits, who teaches the course, and the course content can determine impact. At Suburban University, a college success course has been offered for nearly seven years without a thorough assessment of whether it is successfully contributing to students' transition to college, and the extent to which participation contributes to academic success and social integration. As a case study, the collected qualitative data can be used to understand the experiences of students enrolled in Suburban 101. This study can be used as a tool to guide future decisions regarding the implementation, as well as content of the course at Suburban 101. This study will

contribute to closing current gaps in research surrounding college success courses. Specifically, this study will contribute qualitative data, while most currently available studies surrounding college success courses have been quantitative (O'Gara, et al., 2009). Additionally, as an unintended outcome of this study, I potentially could gain insight into teaching strategies, and instructor characteristics that play a role in student transition and integration.

Assumptions

To conduct a trustworthy case study, I needed to address the assumptions I already have surrounding CSCs. I have been an employee at Suburban 101 for over ten years and during that time I have worked with first year students in varying capacities. I have worked with first-year student athletes by providing academic support and NCAA compliance. I have provided early intervention support to students on academic probation and academic warning, and I currently oversee the success coaching, tutoring, and early alert programs at Suburban 101. Important to note, is that I also used to be an instructor for the Suburban 101 course.

My interactions with first year students in my past and current roles at the University have led to assumptions about the challenges of first-year students as they relate to academic and social integration. Similarly, I have assumptions about how Suburban 101 contributes to the high school to college transitions. My experience as an instructor, as well as my limited involvement in the development of the course, also results in assumptions about the experiences of students enrolled in the course. Furthermore, my past engagement with students has allowed me to understand the vast

range of responses that students have to the transition to college, as well as their responses to the challenge.

To ensure that my assumptions and early involvement with the development of the CSC do not interfere with the trustworthiness of this study, I followed the validation guidelines laid out by Stake (1995). Stake (1995) relies on triangulation, "working to substantiate an interpretation or to clarify its different meanings" (p 173). There are three possible protocols that can be used to triangulate, including data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theory triangulation (Stake, 1995). This study used data source triangulation. This means the data was observed across people interviewed, meaning the study participants described similar experiences within Suburban 101, providing validity to themes that emerged (Stake, 1995). I used member checking, which is asking those involved in the case to review rough drafts for accuracy, once all data has been collected (Stake, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized Schlossberg's theory of transitions as the conceptual framework. Schlossberg's Transition Model defines transitions as "events or non-events resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles" (Patton, et al., 2016, p. 50). This theory recognizes only events that are identified and recognized as transitions for the individual (Patton, et. al., 2016). Schlossberg et al. (2011) suggest that individuals move through transitions at differing paces, but all go through a "moving in," "moving through," and a "moving out," phase. When considering transitions and the meaning for individuals, it is necessary to think about the type of transition, the context, and the impact of the transitions (Patton, et. al., 2016). The move from high school to

college often happens simultaneously with the shift from childhood to adulthood, or from being dependent to independent. During this time, there is a huge shift in responsibilities, making Schlossberg's Transition model relevant to this study.

The Schlossberg's Transition model consists of three types of transitions: those that are anticipated, those that are not anticipated, and non-events, (events that are expected, or likely to occur, but do not) (Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996). Also considered in this theory is the context in which the transition occurs in relation to an individual, and the setting or area of one's life in which it occurs (Patton, et. al., 2016). The impact, or the degree of positive or negative change felt by the individual contributes to the amount of stress caused by the transition (Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996).

How well an individual is able to cope with a transition is dependent upon their perceived ability to navigate four sets of factors, called the 4 S's of Transition. These include situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, et al., 2011). Each of the 4 S's can be further broken down into smaller considerations (Schlossberg, et al., 2011). In any situation, what triggered the change, and whether the change is considered to be on time according to individual expectations can factor into the transition's impact (Schlossberg, et al, 2011). Also considered in each situation is whether the transition was something within the control of the individual, whether the change resulted in a role change, whether there was prior experience with a similar transition, and as other stressors that might be present at the same time (Patton, et. al., 2016). Self-factors include personal and demographic characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, as well as psychological resources available (Patton, et. al., 2016). Support is the third S, and in the Transition Model four types of support are identified,

including “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions/communities” (Patton, et. al., 2016, p 39). Lastly, strategies of coping fall into four different modes; information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Patton, et. al., 2016). Understanding Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is helpful to better understand the complexities of what students coming to college experience, and the supports they need.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study.

College Success Course. A course offered at two- and four-year institutions to assist first semester students adjust to college. Information regarding study skills and strategies, major and career choices, financial literacy, and information about resources available at the institution are commonly covered topics. This type of course can also be referred to as: “College 101”, “Student Success” or “First Year Experience” course.

Case Study. A qualitative method of inquiry that focuses on one unit, such as a group, event, or organization for analysis (Saldana, 2011). A case study allows for in-depth analysis of that one unit (Saldana, 2011).

Freshmen. Students entering their first year of college.

Persistence. A student’s continued progress toward a goal. This can include short- or long-term goals such as course completion or graduation (Reason, 2009). For this study, persistence is defined as measured in terms of perceptions on factors that are associated with students’ intent to persist or stay in college (Davidson, et al., 2009).

Student engagement. Participation in educational activities both inside and outside of the classroom (Harper & Quay, 2015).

Traditional aged student. Students who are aged 18 to 24 and enroll in college directly following high school graduation (Feldman, 2018).

Transition. Any event, or even non-event that causes change in a person's relationships, routines, expectations (Goodman, et. al., 2006).

Summary

Higher education institutions need to retain students for the benefit of both the institution and the students enrolling (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016). To support and aid in the transition to college, some institutions have implemented college success courses (Coleman, et al., 2017). College success courses provide an opportunity for institutions to educate first year students about the support services offered at the institution and assist in the development of skills needed to navigate higher education (Kimbark et al., 2017). Understanding the experiences of students enrolled in a college success course is important for colleges and universities across the country because institutions are investing large amounts of money and resources in these courses.

It is up to each institution to determine how to support these students and retain them through graduation. Creating, but also assessing, the intervention programs being offered are essential to improved graduation rates and student persistence. This study focuses on a college success course at Suburban 101, provides insight into the student experiences of those enrolled.

Overview

In chapter 2, I reviewed the literature related to CSCs, and first-year, traditional aged college students. Chapter 2 also includes research related to college student transition, and other high impact practices for supporting student transition. Chapter 3

describes the methodology used for this study. This includes a detailed description of the study setting, participants, study design, and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the finding of the study, and chapter 5 discusses the results and their implications.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This study addresses the experiences of first-year traditional aged students who are enrolled in a College Success Course (CSC) at a four-year research institution. College Success Courses are offered at a multitude of two-year and four-year institutions across the country to assist in the often-challenging transition from high school to college (Bowering, et al., 2017; Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Kimbark, et. al., 2016; Zeidenberg, et. al., 2007). Implementation of CSCs and other high impact practices such as learning communities, and early alert programs became more prevalent with increased access and diversification of higher education student populations (Coleman, et., al, 2017; Stovall, 2000; Zeidenberg, et. al., 2007). To understand the need for such supports, it is helpful to understand some of the access programs which have led to the influx of students in higher education.

This chapter will briefly review the history of common access programs in higher education, as well as how the implementation of these programs resulted from changing demographics and characteristics of students enrolling. It is important to note, that while the student characteristics changed, higher education was unable or unaware of the need to adapt and change to meet the needs of these students. The lack of congruency between the students enrolling and institutions led to concern surrounding student retention. Once there was focused attention surrounding student retention, institutions finally began searching for interventions to support the changing student population. Some of the high impact practices that institutions have implemented are explained later in the chapter but

many address the transition from high school to college, as any life altering event, such as attending college, can cause stress and anxiety in one's life. The focus of this dissertation is one such intervention, the college success course (CSC), more specifically, the CSC at Suburban University. This intervention was implemented in its original form in 2013, but its impact on the students at Suburban University has yet to be studied. Lastly, this chapter will delve deeper into Schlossberg's Transition Theory, as this theoretical framework can be applied to all students as they enter into college for the first time.

Overtime, the United States federal government has created access programs to make higher education available to populations who previously had limited access (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Kimbark, et al., 2017). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, which later became The GI Bill of Rights, provided education funding for soldiers returning from World War II (Levine & Levine, 2011). Prior to World War II, enrollment in higher education was about 160,000, but by 1950, enrollment had ballooned to nearly half a million, with more servicemen attending college than the government anticipated (Levine & Levine, 2011). Black students, Jews, and Catholics from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds had extremely limited access to college pre-war, but these opportunities expanded exponentially with the passing of the GI Bill (Levine & Levine, 2011).

The National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA), considered a turning point in higher education, provided funding for universities strong in math, science, and foreign languages (Jolly, 2009; Yudof, 2010). To compete with the Soviet Union, the United States government wanted to develop students strong in these areas (Flattau et al., 2005; Jolly, 2009; Urban, 2010). This bill linked federal financial support, in the form of loans,

to national defense (Urban, 2010). The federal government provided 90% of the funding for these loans, leaving the institutions responsible for the other 10% (Urban, 2010).

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) was promoted by President Lydon B. Johnson to break the cycle of poverty. This bill combined multiple government programs which included College Work Study, Job Corps, Head Start, and Neighborhood Youth Corps (Higgs, 2011). From the Economic Opportunity Act came The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) which awarded additional federal aid for low-income students in the form of scholarships, low interest loans, and improved educational resources for institutions (Baum, Harris, Kelly, & Mitchell, 2017). From the passing of the HEA came a new federal program called TRIO, which consisted of three separate access programs (Bowden & Belfield, 2015). These programs included Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services (Bowden & Belfield, 2015). Overtime, the TRIO Program has grown to include eight separate programs, designed to develop student skills in middle and high school, prior to enrolling in college (Dyce, et al., 2012; Haskins & Rouse, 2013; Perna, & Rowan-Kenyon, 2008). Pell Grants were also created through HEA to provide students from lower income families the opportunity to pursue a degree in higher education (Yudof, 2010). The HEA has been reauthorized many times since its inception.

Most recently, in 1998, The United States Department of Education created a new program as an amendment to the Higher Education Act called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) (Sanchez, Lowman, & Hill, 2018; Ward, et al., 2013). The most significant difference between GEAR UP and TRIO is that GEAR UP prepares entire cohorts of students for college beginning in middle

school and continuing through high school and college enrollment rather than just first-generation or those showing academic ability (Ward, et. al, 2013).

Access programs can be funded federally, funded through state governments, or with non-governmental monies, but all have the shared aim of closing the achievement gap between low-income students and high-income students and between minoritized students and White students (Dyce, & Albold Long, 2012; Hurst, 2012). In part because of these programs, the student population attending college now is more diverse than it has ever been (Aud, et al., 2010; Pacarella, et al., 2013). While there has been progress with diverse populations being admitted, historically underrepresented populations, including minoritized student populations, low-income, and first-generation college students are retained at lower rates than their White, high income and continuing generation counterparts (Carnelvale & Strohl, 2013; Daly & Bengali, 2014; NCES, 2016; Parks, et al., 2017). These students are often underprepared academically, require remedial coursework, and also lack the other knowledge needed throughout the transition to college (Nix, et al., 2015; Parks, et. al., 2017).

For this reason, among others, institutions are searching for programs to develop skills and provide needed support services with the high school to college transition. Multiple intervention strategies, or high impact practices, have gained popularity. These include the use of learning communities, summer bridge programs, proactive advising, and the implementation of freshman seminars or College Success Courses (Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Kimbark, et al., 2017). Overtime, researchers have learned more about the first-year experience, including identifying barriers to persistence and strategies to ease the transition for students

(Feldman, 2018). Barriers to student persistence include affordability, psychological well-being, student engagement, and psychosocial characteristics (Jenkins, et al., 2013; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Rorison, et al., 2018). Strategies to assist students in the sometimes-challenging transition to college include the use of bridge programs, orientations, proactive advising, learning communities, and CSCs (Pike & Kuh, 2005; McConnell, 2000).

Student Persistence and Retention

Once students have enrolled and transitioned into higher education, retention is certainly an important focus for institutions. While the words persistence and retention are sometimes used interchangeably, students persist, and institutions retain students (Hagedorn, 2005). Students' characteristics contribute to their ability and desire to persist, but institutional characteristics contribute as much to student retention (Ziskin, et al., 2014). A broad definition of persistence is when a student is continuing at the same institution where they initially enrolled or continuing in higher education but at a different institution (Leppel, 2001). Retention rates for first-year entering students have been historically disappointing, with 20% of four-year freshmen not returning for their second year (Daly & Bengali, 2014; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016). Overall, including two and four-year institutions, the six-year graduation rate is 60% (NCES, 2016). Student demographics and prior educational experiences each play a role in a student's ability to persist.

Student persistence has become a focus within higher education, as it is readily recognized that student attrition is not good for the student, institutions, or economy (Barefoot, 2004, Braxton, 2008; Habley, et al, 2012; Herzog, 2005). When a student

leaves an institution prior to earning a degree; the student is responsible for any outstanding loans and is likely to lose upward career mobility and income (Habley, et al., 2012; Wood & Breyer, 2017). Students who do not complete a college degree also risk having less autonomy in their career field, more challenging working conditions, and inferior benefit packages (Perna & Jones, 2013). Bachelor's degrees are currently a minimum for many careers in the middle class (Merolla, 2017).

Student retention is increasingly important for higher education institutions due to decreasing government funding, declining admission rates, and increasing operational costs (Daniel, 2014). When students are not retained, institutions suffer because of lost tuition dollars. Enrollments are expanding overall, but budgetary support from states and the federal government have not kept pace forcing institutions to make up the gaps through tuition dollars (Schwieber & Ludwig, 2018; Wood &Breyer, 2017). Retaining students is more cost effective than having to constantly recruit new students to fill vacancies left through student departure (Habley, et. al, 2012). Furthermore, when students are not retained, institutions risk loss of graduates who could later become financially contributing alumni (Walesska, et al, 2017). Institutions are facing greater scrutiny than ever before when it comes to retention and graduation rates (Millea, et al., 2018; Schweiber & Ludwig, 2018). These rates are being published in various magazines and websites, and are calculated into institutional rankings, which become important for enrollment (Lounsbury, et al., 2016). The entire process is cyclical, which is why student retention has become such a focus in higher education.

Economically, colleges and universities contribute to communities in which they reside but also to the world (Habley, et al., 2012: Schofer, et al., 2020). Through income

tax revenue, the average college graduate will pay more than 100% more in federal income taxes than their non-degree earning peers (Baum & Payea, 2005). In turn, taxes contribute to services to support public services such as education and infrastructure (Habley, et al., 2012). College graduates also raise the average payrate for all workers, as the number of college graduates increases by 1%, the pay rate for high school graduate increases by 1.6% (Association of Governing Boards, 2019). Degree attainment also fulfills a need within communities to create a competent, productive workforce (Fike & Fike, 2008; Hill, et al, 2005).

Student Characteristics

Research has found that socioeconomic status, along with parent's educational level, and race/ethnicity are major contributing factors to student dropout (Perna & Jones, 2013; Rorison, Voight, & Poutre, 2018; Stage & Rushin, 1993). These factors are often interrelated, with each influencing the other. These students often attend high schools with less rigorous curriculum, or more lenient graduation requirements, resulting in being underprepared for the academic challenges of higher education and more likely to need remedial coursework (Bowen et al., 2010; Venezia, et al., 2004).

Socioeconomic Status

Carnevale, et al. (2010) suggest that "postsecondary education gradually became the threshold requirement for access to middle class status and earnings" (p. 3). For students from low-income families, earning a bachelor's degree is one way for them to move up in socioeconomic status (Cappelli, 2015; Carnevale, et al., 2010; Castleman & Long, 2016). Access programs have added more low- and middle-income students to higher education, but the cost of attendance has far outpaced the rate of inflation and

family incomes (Castleman & Long, 2016; Heller, 2011). As a result, there is still an almost 20% difference between college attendance for high achieving, low-income students, and their high achieving, higher income peers, and this gap widens when comparing for four-year degree completion (Perna & Jones, 2013). Students from low-income families are also less likely to enroll full-time, which contributes to completing a four-year degree (Adelman, et al, 2003; Heller, 2013; Wei & Horn, 2002). Not surprisingly, 56% of high-income students graduated in six years compared to only 26% of low-income students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015-2016).

Financial aid in most instances is meant to be an equalizer to educational opportunities by providing access to higher education, as well as an opportunity to engage on a college campus (Cabrera, et al., 1992). However, merit-based grants tend to be awarded to wealthier students due to the recognized correlation between grades and income (Ehrenberg et al, 2005, Heller & Marin, 2004). Yet, the awarding of grant aid has been shown to positively promote college enrollment particularly for low-income students, who tend to be more hesitant to borrow (Baum, et. al., 2008). Students' perceptions of their financial aid packages to cover the cost of college can also be a predictor of student retention (Cabrera et al., 1992).

First-Generation

First-generation college students, broadly defined as students whose parents did not attend college or earn a college degree, are "disproportionately overrepresented in the most disadvantaged groups relative to participation in higher education" (Engle, 2007, p. 25). By the time first-generation students enter the eighth grade, they already have lower expectations about their level of education than their non-first-generation peers (Choy,

2001). These groups disproportionately include Black, Latinx, female students, and those from low-income families (Engle, 2007). While first-generation college students face challenges, their enrollment has been increasing over recent years (US Department of Education, 2019). These students often enter college less academically prepared in terms of high school GPA and standardized test scores and graduate at a lower rate than their continuing generation peers (College Board, 2011). The reported six-year graduation rate for first generation students is 56% (Atheron, 2014, Choy, 2001; NASPA, 2015-2016).

First-generation college students are at a disadvantage throughout the entire application, admissions, and enrollment process (Nichols & Islas, 2016). Since their parents have not graduated from college, they often lack an understanding of the complicated processes in higher education (Garriott, et al., 2015). First-generation students also feel less prepared, worry about financial aid, and fear failing more than their non- first-generation peers (Bui, 2002; Choy, 2001). These students are often trying to work full-time, have housing concerns, and need to commute to campus, characteristics that combine to make the transition to college and college success more difficult across all demographics (Unverferth, et al., 2012).

Race and Ethnicity

To adequately address academic persistence, race and ethnicity needs to be recognized as a contributing factor (John & Musoba, 2011). Students of color encounter structural and cultural barriers that impede college enrollment (Espinosa & Mitchell, 2020). Many of these barriers were constructed many years ago, but higher education has failed to rectify them (Espinosa & Mitchell, 2020). As institutions focus on persistence and graduation of all students, it is essential to pay close attention to racially and

ethnically marginalized students to create change and close the persistence and graduation gap. The role of race and ethnicity in college persistence can be difficult to separate from other confounding interactions with other variables including family income and first-generation status (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Stage & Hossler, 2000). Black students are less likely to persist than their White counterparts, a gap that has persisted for years (Hagedorn, et al., 2001). Black women graduate at a rate of 44% in a six-year period (NCES, 2019), however the six-year graduation rate for Black males is 34%, which is alarming (NCES, 2019). While women are more likely to persist than males overall, Black women have been found to graduate from community colleges at lower rates than Black males and women from all other racial groups (Walpole, et al., 2014).

Like the experiences of their Black peers, Latinx students face inequities prior to college enrollment as well as within the higher education system (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Freeman & Martinez, 2015; Gandara, 2017; McDonogh, 2004). According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2013), there is a significantly lower probability that Latino/a students will attend selective institutions, enroll in college full-time, or complete their degree compared to their White counterparts. When compared by gender, females are more likely to attend and graduate then male students (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Latinx students encounter similar challenges as other minoritized populations such difficulty navigating the complexities of the higher education experience, inability to finance the cost of attendance, or needing to prioritize familial responsibilities (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008; Freeman & Martinez, 2015). When attending an institution, it is possible that Latino/a students are entering a subculture different from the one they are most familiar

and most comfortable (Freeman & Martinez, 2015). The culture of institutions is often unwelcoming for Latinx students as well as for other students of color.

These student populations are worth studying, as they make up a large portion of students enrolling in college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the four-year graduation rate for the 2012 cohort for White students was 48% while Black students graduate at half the rate, at 24% percent. Latinx students graduate at a rate of 34%, while Asian students graduate at a higher rate than White students, with approximately 53% graduating in four years (NCES, 2020). The graduation gaps by race and ethnicity for public, private, and non-profit institutions is similar.

The most recent statistics published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), show that minoritized students attending public four-year institutions graduate at lower rates than their peers in each of the above-mentioned categories of socioeconomic status, first generation status, and race/ethnicity. Knowing this, institutions need to be intentional in the supports being provided and how they are delivered but must also ensure that their policies are equitable. Minoritized students, particularly students of color, face discrimination across their educational careers which leads to different experiences and difficulty integrating into predominately White institutions (Holland, 2012; VanderWeele & Robinson, 2014; Wagner, 2015). It must be reiterated that the disparities in graduation rates cannot be blamed on the characteristics of the students enrolling, but on institution's inability to create an environment, and culture in which minoritized students can thrive. If a student is admitted to a University it should be assumed that the educational prerequisites have been met, or, the institution is equipped to provide the support students require.

Institutional Practices

To address these disparities, institutions have begun to incorporate high-impact practices that correlate positively with retention and engagement, and that make a favorable difference in the lives of students (Kuh, 2007). The National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] (2007) identified six characteristics that distinguish high impact practices from others. The first characteristic is that the activity should be directed toward an educational goal and require quite a bit of time and effort for the student (NSSE, 2007). High impact practices should involve educational experiences with faculty or peers, at the same time exposing students to diverse ideas and worldviews (NSSE, 2007). High impact practices should also provide students with frequent and ongoing feedback, allow an opportunity for students to use their knowledge to solve real world problems, and lastly, high impact practices should provide students with the opportunity to synthesize ideas that can alter their perceptions of the world and themselves (NSSE, 2007). First-year seminars, such as CSCs, is a high impact practice that can be directly tied to retention. The first year is of particular interest as it sets the stage for the remainder of a student's undergraduate experience (Greenfield, et a., 2017).

There are a multitude of factors that positively impact a student's transition from high school to college, including self-efficacy, self-regulated and autonomous learning, and social integration (Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Devonport & Lane; 2006). With the understanding that the transition from high school to college can be challenging for students, first year transition programs have become highly valued across higher education (Habley, et al., 2012). Seven practices that should be considered part of a first-year transition program include: summer orientations, extended freshman orientation,

freshman 101 or college success courses, living learning communities, non-residential learning communities, freshman interest groups, and integrating academic advising with the first-year transition program (Bloom et al., 2012; Greenfield et al., 2013; McClanahan, et al., 2010). Of these seven practices, summer orientations, college success courses, and non-residential learning communities are the most valuable interventions (Habley, et al., 2012).

Orientation Programs

Being offered as early as 1888, summer orientation programs are typically held during the summer, prior to the start of fall classes, and are rather short in duration; anywhere from a half day to a week-long (Habley, et al., 2012; Greenfield, et. al., 2013). Orientation programs should accomplish four objectives which include: facilitating the transition, helping students understand the opportunities and responsibilities of being a college student, integration to the institution, and providing guidance to the student's family (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009). Orientation programs are a campus-wide effort, involving multiple campus partners, as well as an increasing number of external partners to support the increasingly diverse student populations (Greenfield, et. al., 2013).

The information provided to students during orientations tend to fall into four categories which include: safety and well-being, academic activities, co-curricular activities, and student services (Mann et al., 2010; Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). Because the amount of information being provided can be overwhelming, using a student development theory, such as Schlossberg's transition theory, to organize them,

and create meaningful outcomes can be effective (Greenfield et al., 2013; Mann et al., 2010)

Summer Bridge Programs

Summer Bridge programs are another intervention offered after high school graduation and prior to a student's first semester in college to assist in the transition (Gonzalez & Garza, 2018). Bridge programs are often targeted at low-income or first-generation college students to prepare them for college enrollment (Kallison & Stader, 2012). Academic instruction, tutoring, study skill development, mentoring, and counseling are typically included in bridge programs (Kallison & Stader, 2012). Summer Bridge programs tend to be intensive, introducing students to the expectations of college (Quiroz & Garza, 2018). Participants in Summer Bridge programs have higher grade point averages and are more likely to persist and graduate compared to those who do not participate in Bridge programs (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Cabrera et al., 2013; Wachen, et al., 2018; Walpole et al., 2008). While funding for summer Bridge programs may have different funding sources, many began with the federal funding from Upward Bound (Kallison & Stader, 2012).

Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising, sometimes referred to as proactive advising, particularly during a student's initial semester in college is another method institutions are instituting to retain students (Escobedo, 2007). The goal of intrusive advising is to develop intentional relationships with students to motivate them to request assistance when needed (Varney, 2007). To identify students who are at risk of not persisting, institutions have implemented retention software that uses learning analytics to pinpoint and identify

these students (Villano, et al., 2018). Identifying these students allows institutions to intervene early and provide them targeted support (Villano, et al., 2018). The most important aspect of proactive advising is showing students that someone cares about them and their academic success (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). When possible, mid-term grades, attendance, and classroom behavior should also be closely monitored and interventions should be employed when needed (Varney, 2007). Proactive advising can also improve one- and two-year retention rates for underprepared STEM students (Rogers, et al, 2014). Similarly, other at-risk populations, such as underprepared, underrepresented, and first-generation students also benefit from intrusive advising (King & Kerr, 2005).

Learning Communities

One added layer of support that some institutions have explored is the implementation of learning communities. Learning communities have been present long throughout the history of higher education, originally encompassing the residential aspect of campus life (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). Overtime, learning communities evolved to include both residential and academic areas of learning (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). These communities are designed to create supportive networks, feelings of belonging, and a more holistic experience both within and across curriculums (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Love, 2012). Different forms of learning communities offered include academic themed and interest themed (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

Learning communities can be most beneficial for minoritized students (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Moreover, low-income students participating in a learning community are more engaged in their campus community and persist at higher rates after one year compared to students of similar socioeconomic status who did not participate in a

learning community (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Similarly, students involved in learning communities have better class attendance, which leads to higher grades and improved engagement (Bonet & Walters, 2016).

College Success Courses

College success courses, sometimes referred to as first-year seminars, or extended orientation courses were introduced in the late 1880's (Gordon, 1989; Porter & Swing, 2006). The intention of these intervention programs is to assist in the transition from high school to college, to orient the students to campus resources and policies, to develop the study and learning skills needed for success, and often, to introduce students to available vocational paths (Hatch, Mardock-Uman, Garcia, & Johnson, 2018). Barefoot's (1992) working definition of a first-year seminar course is still used today: "The freshmen seminar is a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of specific topics, which vary by seminar type, (b) to essential skills for college success, and (c) to selected processes (?), the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group" (p. 49).

As access to higher education expanded, institutions began using CSCs to support students who would not have been accepted, or would not even had the opportunity to apply, in the earliest years of higher education existence (Coleman, et., al, 2017; Stovall, 2000; Zeidenberg, et. al., 2007). These populations include first-generation college students, students whose SAT or ACT scores fall below a given threshold, and indirectly, students from minoritized populations (Bowering, et. al., 2017; Claybrooks & Taylor, 2016; Kimbark, et. al., 2016; Zeidenberg, et. al., 2007).

There is a significant amount of variation regarding how these courses are structured across institutions and sometimes even within institutions (Greenfield, et al., 2013). At some institutions, these courses are offered seminar style, while others offer learning communities that provide integrated support services (Kimbark, et al., 2017). Typically, CSCs are semester-long courses, can range anywhere from one to three credits, and are letter graded (Padgett & Keup, 2011). Some institutions require the course for all entering students, others require it for specific populations, some have enrolling in the course optional, while other schools may have any combination of the aforementioned (Kimbark, et. al, 2017; Barefoot et al., 2012; Padgett & Keup, 2011). First year students often targeted in CSCs are those who may have been identified as at-risk upon admission (Hoops et al., 2015). Instructors can also differ, ranging from student affairs members, current faculty, or academic advisors, among others (Kimbark, et al., 2017). In almost all instances, class sizes are kept small to allow for greater instructor and student interactions, as well as more meaningful discussions and group activities (Swing, 2002).

Participation in college success courses positively impacts student persistence so much so that 88% to 95% of four-year institutions offer a first-year seminar course to at least some portion of their student body (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012; Padgett & Keup; Policy Center on the First Year of College, 2002). Students in first-year experience courses at a four-year public research institutions persist and graduate at higher rates than their peers with similar academic profiles, and also earn higher GPAs the semester following course enrollment (Lang, 2007; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011). Community college students also benefit from participation in college orientation

courses, with increased persistence and degree attainment (Cho & Karp, 2013; Derby & Smith, 2004). Some students, even when not sure of expected learning outcomes for the course, found value in the opportunity to discuss the experience of attending college and to practice the skills they will need for success (Hatch, et al., 2018). It could be argued that providing students with the knowledge of how to navigate higher education and develop confidence in the process, could be as beneficial as knowledge they gain from participation in the course (Karp & Bork, 2014). Because much is known about the positive impact of these types of freshmen courses, they can be used as the anchor for a comprehensive first-year experience program.

It can be seen through multiple studies that there can be positive outcomes from the implementation of CSCs, however, due to the variation in course design, it cannot be assumed that all courses, at all institutions, have the same impact on student experiences or student outcomes (Hatch, et al., 2018). From the available literature, it is not clear how institutions are able to address the many desired outcomes through a single course, and the programmatic details of individual programs are often left out of the research making it difficult to compare institutional implementation across institutions (Crisp & Taggart, 2013). Furthermore, there can be gaps in course catalog descriptions, instructor understanding of course outcomes, as well as expectations regarding skill introduction, mastery, or a student's ability to practice learned skills in their lived experience (Hatch, et al, 2018). Since the implementation of a CSC at Suburban University, there has not been a formal review or study of the program, and this study will help to fill that gap.

Theoretical Framework: Schlossberg's Transition Theory

The transition from high school to college can be a challenging and stressful time in the lives of first year students. For this reason, attrition, or student drop-out, most often occurs between the first and second year of college (Habley, et al., 2012). To ease the transition, and improve retention, colleges and universities have implemented college success courses as a way to support students in that transition. Schlossberg's transition theory can assist in understanding the complexity of circumstances that collide for students as they attempt to navigate their first year in college, and therefore serves as the conceptual framework for this study.

Schlossberg's transition framework included the Four S System, which included self, stage, situation, and style at the point of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Men attributed institutional support, workshops, and counseling services as having a positive impact on their ability to find new jobs (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980). The transition model continued to be revised as more was learned about the experiences of those transitioning (Schlossberg, 1990). Schlossberg's (1990) refined model, recognized that the type of transition is important to consider, along with the degree to which an individual experience changes in relations, roles, and routines. From that realization, the current version of the Four Ss emerged; these include situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1990). The goal of the model has always been to assist in the development of intervention strategies and supportive measures that are appropriate for individuals experiencing a transition (Schlossberg, 1980). Schlossberg's Transition Theory, as it exists currently, suggests that any transition, whether positive or negative, whether the transition actually occurs or is just anticipated, can disrupt lives and change

perceptions of our existence (Barclay, 2017). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002), explained that every transition begins with an end to something, and takes place over time. Transitions do not occur in one moment, or one specific instance (Anderson et al., 2012). For higher education institutions and faculty and staff within, applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory can help understand the challenges students face, and assist students in overcoming those challenges (Schlossberg, 2008).

Schlossberg (2008) suggests that there are three phases to each transition: *moving in, moving through, or moving out.* Moving in includes the planning and assessment period, moving though is when the most learning about the new role, new relationships, and routines occurs, and moving out is the process of feeling like it is time to move on to the next phase of life (Patton, et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 2008). For students who are transitioning into college, moving in is the time when students are thinking, often feeling a lot of stress, about moving to campus, having a roommate, making friends, getting involved, and what the expectation of college life entails (Barclay, 2017). Once students are enrolled and attending class, they would be considered in the moving through phase of their transition as they are trying to juggle the multiple responsibilities including school work, a social life, and family (Barclay, 2017). The moving out phase of a college student transition could be looking for jobs, deciding where to live past graduation, or even graduation itself (Barclay, 2017).

Another important element to Schlossberg's Transition Theory is the four domains, often referred to as the four Ss (Schlossberg, 2008; Schlossberg, et al, 2011). The four Ss include; situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). Schlossberg (2008) suggests that individuals can ease transitions by *taking stock*

or examining the situation and the coping strategies and resources available for that particular transition. The four Ss will be discussed below along with components that comprise each of the four Ss.

Situation

When applying Schlossberg's theory, the situation includes whether the transition was planned or unplanned, or even a nonevent (Patton, et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 2008). A nonevent is when there is something a student wants to happen, but it does not actually happen (Schlossberg, 2008). Other factors contributing to a student's situation include the timing of the transition, what triggered the transition to begin, any prior experiences with similar situations, and any other stress the student might be under simultaneously (Anderson, et al., 2012). For some students entering college, they may be entering their first choice of colleges, while others, they might be forced to attend a particular institution by their parents, or they might have to select their college for financial reasons. There are also some students who anticipate going away to college, but for a variety of reasons might not be able to attend, this would be an example of a nonevent.

Self

Self, as described by Schlossberg (2008), includes self-awareness of beliefs, abilities, and attitudes. Self also includes personal and demographic characteristics, coping strategies, outlook, and level of resistance or commitment to the transition itself (Anderson, et al., 2012). Socioeconomic status, first-generation status, and race and ethnicity are three self-variables that influence how well a student navigates through the college transition (Patton, et al., 2016). How a student perceives the transition, whether

positive or negative, influences their outlook (Anderson, et. al., 2012). A student in the situation mentioned above, who is able to attend their first-choice institution, might have a brighter outlook than the student who was forced to attend their institution by their parents.

Strategies

According to Schlossberg (2008), strategies are the coping resources that individuals use to protect themselves psychologically. Taking stock of available coping resources includes two parts; the first is knowing what resources are available and would be most impactful for their needs and the second is deciding which of four strategies should be used in the transition. The four strategies include modifying the situation, changing the meaning of the situation, taking control of and managing the situation, or doing nothing and ignoring the situation (Schlossberg, 2008).

Support

A strong support system can help everyone at all times, but during stressful times of transition, support can be even more important (Schlossberg, 2008). According to Schlossberg (2008), there are four types of support which include: intimate relationships, family units, friends, and institutions. An individual relies on these supports for affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Schlossberg, 2008). For college students, support tends to come from their families, their peers, student organizations, faculty or staff members, or the campus recreation center. There are a multitude of support systems on every college campus, but students need to be able to locate them and be able to form connections in order to benefit from those supports (Schlossberg, 2008). For each individual, there are both stable and changing supports (Schlossberg, 2008).

Summary of Literature Review

The students enrolling in higher education will continue to bring diverse perspectives and experiences with them as they embark on their transition from high school to college. It will be imperative for institutions to continue to explore student characteristics that lead to persistence and attrition, as well as strategies to support students in the transition and beyond.

There is a plethora of research available that suggests students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, first-generation college students, and students from marginalized populations are less likely to enroll and persist through graduation (John & Musoba, 2011). For some students there is intersectionality with each of these factors which can compound the challenges of a new college student. According to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, the characteristics described would all be considered part of the *self*-domain of the 4 Ss.

Practitioners and researchers have studied interventions that assist in student persistence and found that focusing on the transition from high school to college can be an impactful practice. First-year transition programs that have shown promising results including summer bridge and orientation programs, learning communities, intrusive advising, and the use of CSCs. This study will specifically explore the experiences of students who enrolled in a CSC course at Suburban University.

Chapter three will outline the qualitative research methods that will be used in this case study to explore the experiences of traditional first-year freshmen students enrolled in a CSC. Also included in the chapter will be a description of, and rationale for the chosen study design, and an evaluation of case study design, and its limitations.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in this case study to understand the experiences of students previously enrolled in a college success course. A detailed description of the data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations are discussed. This study was conducted over a three-month period.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is conducted for various reasons such as evaluating the effectiveness of a program, to gain new insight about social complexities, and to examine the experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2011). Generating knowledge and learning in real world settings is the purpose for conducing qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative research is a general term for a variety of approaches to studying natural social phenomena (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This study utilized a qualitative case study research design to learn about the experiences of students who were enrolled in the College 101 course as well as how, if at all, the course influenced students' social and academic integration.

Strategy of Inquiry

A case study design focuses on one group, one organization, or one event, while allowing for an in-depth examination (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Saldana, 2020). Case study design allows researchers to study often complicated phenomena in relation to their contexts, making a case study approach valuable for program evaluation as well as the development of intervention strategies (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2003). A case study approach uses multiple data sources which can include

documentation, interviews, and archival records (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, Stake, 2003). Broadly, Stake (1995) defines a case as "a specific, a complex, functioning thing," with working parts (p. 2). According to Creswell (2014), this type of inquiry is appropriate in an educational setting to perform an in-depth analysis of a program. While some case study designs can include quantitative methods, the majority of case studies, like this one, are qualitative (McCombes, 2022). This study design, a qualitative intrinsic case study, is appropriate when the researcher has an interest in understanding a particular case (Stake, 1995). This is true for this study, as I was an instructor for a section of this course and have an interest in outcomes for students enrolled. Using a qualitative case study approach provided an opportunity to add to the literature relating to CSCs, while gaining a better understanding of the experiences of students enrolled in Suburban 101 specifically.

Research Questions

Qualitative research uses research questions rather than goals or hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). These questions take the form of a central question, and related sub-questions that provide focus for the study (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of students who were enrolled in a college success course and to explore the noncognitive factors that contribute to student college persistence. In addition, this study explored how students perceive the college success course in relation to their persistence using these research questions. The following overarching research question and sub-questions guided this study:

1. *What are the experiences of first-year, full-time, first-generation, Black and Latinx, Pell-Eligible college students enrolled in Suburban 101?* There are three sub-questions that will help answer this question. They include:

    a. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to social transition?
    b. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to academic transition?
    c. What contributions, if any, does enrollment in Suburban 101 have on motivation to remain enrolled?

Setting/Context

This study was conducted at a public, four-year institution located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Current undergraduate enrollment is 15,963, and the graduate and professional school enrollment is 2,466 (University website, 2020). The University average SAT score for students entering in the fall 2021 as was 1182 (Director of Admissions, 2021). Currently, the institution offers over 80 different majors. The student population at the University is increasingly diverse with 33% of the student body from minoritized groups. These minoritized groups are categorized according to the university website. The CSC at Suburban University enrolled 905 total students in the fall 2021.

This site was selected because the College Success Course was implemented in the fall 2014, yet no formal examination of the student experiences for those enrolled has been conducted. Since the start of the CSC at Suburban University, the course has evolved from a hybrid summer course offered to specially admitted students, to a two-credit hour course offered only on campus in the fall and spring semesters. At the time

Suburban 101 was created, a special admit was any admitted student who did not meet the regular admissions standards of the institution.

The first time the course was offered in a fall semester only nine total sections were offered, with 171 students enrolled. At that time, most sections were for students within a singular program designed for educationally and economically disadvantaged students and only three were offered to the general freshmen population. The number of students enrolled in Suburban 101 has expanded significantly since the inception, with nearly one-third of the incoming freshmen enrolled in a section for the fall 2021 semester. There is now a broader range of specialized sections being offered, with the same population of economically and educationally disadvantaged students, Exploratory Studies, or undecided students, and pre-business students also being automatically enrolled. Other first-year students who are automatically enrolled in Suburban 101 are students whose SAT scores are below 1040, and those who are admitted test optional. During the fall 2021 semester there was also a section for sophomore students that is being offered as a pilot. While this selection of students is automatically enrolled, all students except for those who are in the earlier mentioned program for educationally and economically disadvantaged students can remove themselves from the course if they desire.

At Suburban University, each instructor for the course is provided a course outline that lists the topics and expected outcomes for the course. Also provided to the instructors through an online portal, is a list of activities, presentations, and potential guest speakers the instructor can choose to use, or not use, when they are teaching the course. Course topics for Suburban 101 include academic integrity, time management,

goal setting, study skills and note taking, social interaction and diversity, considering majors and careers, managing money, health and wellness, among others. There are assignments and rubrics provided to faculty to maintain some consistency across sections. Faculty do have the freedom to make changes to assignments if they choose and to modify activities as long as the course objectives are being met.

Sampling

A criterion sample, which was used in this study, divides a population based on specific criterion to meet the needs of a study (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The characteristics, or criterion for this study include first-generation, Pell-eligible, Black and Latinx students, both male and female. The student who participated in the interviews from the selected criteria were based on a convenience sample of students who respond and are willing to participate in the study (Creswell, 2014).

What is important when considering the sample size is that the interviews result in information rich responses that help in answering the research questions (Malterud, et al., 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Sample size selection should enhance the ability to generalize the study findings and generate data that is believable (Curtis, et al., 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). When the aim of a case study is to understand the experiences of individuals, keeping the sample size small is recommended (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For this study, nine participants were selected from the 183 Black and Latinx students who are Pell-eligible, first-generation, and who were enrolled in Suburban 101 during their first semester in college. All participants were both Pell-eligible and first-

generation; half of the participants identified as Black, and half identified as Latinx. Participants were both male and female.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative case studies benefit from multiple sources of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2003). This study utilizes semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation. Students who met the criteria for participation in the study were found on Suburban University's online database, to which I have access through my role at the University. Through the same database, student emails were collected, and students were invited to participate through their Suburban 101 email addresses. Students were emailed and offered a $25 Wawa gift card if they participated. Even though the data was collected from a data base that should include accurate information, the characteristics of students being asked to participate were clearly outlined in the body of the email. The first students to respond were emailed back and asked to set up a time and location to meet. I offered the campus library as an option, and all students agreed to meet here. Initially, I did not have enough students respond to complete my study, so I sent a second email, and then a text message asking students to participate.

Interview

Interviewing is a valuable technique in qualitative study as it can provide rich data on people's perceptions of their environment (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Semi-structured interviews typically have a guided list of questions that allow for flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews ask the same questions, but wording and order matter less than in a structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were invited to participate in in-person interviews, anticipating they would last anywhere from

60 to 90 minutes at a time that is convenient for both the participant and the researcher. Interviews were conducted at the campus library on the Suburban 101 campus and were audio recorded using Zoom to assist with transcription. Only audio was collected, the computer camera was turned off. The reason for using Zoom was because it creates a transcript of the interview once the interview is downloaded. Although Zoom was able to create a transcript, I ended up using a different website called Rev to transcribe the interviews. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in appendix B.

Graphic Elicitation

Graphic elicitation uses diagrams, maps, photographs, or other visual stimuli created by the researcher or participant to evoke emotions that might not otherwise be revealed (Blackwell, et., al, 2006; Prosser & Loxley, 2008). The use of visual context can bring about different ways of thinking and take participants past their usual verbal communication (Bagnoli, 2009). The use of visuals can help overcome silences, specifically in relation to sensitive and difficult topics, as well as put the study participant at ease (Bagnoli, 2009; Shaw, 2013). Typically, with the use of graphic elicitation, the visual aids represent a phenomenon in which the interviewee is involved (Shaw, 2013).

This study used photo-elicitation interviews (PEI), using photographs integrated into an interview to potentially add new insights (Chaplin, 2002; Harper, 2002; Lapenta, 2012). Using photographs can bring memories, or reflections, that lead participants to make new meaning of old experiences (Chaplin, 2002). Similarly, Vila (2013), suggests "photos speak a language of emotions and meaning" (p. 65). The use of photographs in qualitative research was first introduced by John Collier in 1957, after its introduction, the use of photo elicitation saw a significant increase, and then waned in popularity

(Harper, 2002). In recent years there has been a renewed interest in using photographs in qualitative research (Harper, 2002; Parker, 2005; Stanczak, 2004). The use of photo elicitation can be empowering for study participants as it allows the participant to have more control over the direction of their responses (Bates, et al., 2019, Lapenta, 2012, Richard & Lahman, 2015). Another benefit of using photographs is that they can help with building trust and an additional level of comfort for participants along with creating more engagement and interest (Banks, 2008; Lapenta, 2012; Mahruf & Shohel, 2012).

There are two types of photo elicitation used in research; the first is when the researcher supplies the photographs from already existing photographs or photos the researcher took themselves (Leonard & McKnight, 2015). The second type of photo elicitation is when the study participants provide photographs, this is called auto-driven photo elicitation, as the photographs "drive" the interview (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002; Leonard & McKnight, 2015). For this study, I used the more traditional form of PEI, where I provide photographs used in the interviews. Photos were obtained via a website called Unsplash. Unsplash provides free, downloadable photographs created by people all over the world (Unsplash.com). I selected eight photographs to show the interviewees and asked each participant to select two photographs that most closely align with their transition to Suburban University. All participants selected the two photographs from the same set of provided photographs. When deciding which photographs to show the participants, I searched the words "college", "social", "academic" and "transition", and selected from images shown. I chose a variety of photographs ranging in subject, and colors. The photographs can be seen in appendix C.

Prior to starting the interviews, I reflected on the cultural and power dynamics between myself, and the students being interviewed (Nimmon & Stenfors-Hayes, 2016). I also drafted an easy-to-understand summary of what the study is about, and why the participant's insight is so valuable to understanding more about the Suburban 101 class (McGrath, 2019). This summary was one step in gaining trust and building rapport with the participants. Similarly, at the onset of the interviews, I further explained my interest in the intersections of their identities and how their identities have contributed to their experiences. Being non-judgmental, non-threatening, and respectful was important to put the participants at ease (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each interview began with a review of the informed consent form, and a chance for the participant to ask questions or express concerns. Once all questions have been addressed, the participants were invited to sign the consent form and provided a copy. After the participant signed the consent form, I got verbal consent to audio record the interviews via Zoom.

Once all of this was completed, and after the first half of the interview, I presented the eight photographs, printed in color, and asked the participants which photographs most closely align with their experience in transitioning to college. In creating the interview questions, I needed to ensure they were clear to the interviewee and contained familiar language and terms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). With each initial question, probes were used when needed. Probes are a follow-up to something that has already been asked to gain additional insight or encourage a further response (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Probes can range from a follow-up question, to silence, to evoke an additional response (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

My life experiences and the respondent's experiences are unique from each other. Predetermined biases were brought to the interview by both parties. I needed to keep this in mind to remain non-judgmental. At the conclusion of each interview, the respondents were informed that I may contact them in the future if I need additional information or follow up questions are needed. I took notes of any interviewee reactions, pauses, or ideas that seem interesting and meaningful once the interview had concluded. Each interview was audio recorded via Zoom. After each interview, I recorded, in a personal journal, emotions that were evoked during the interview and reactions to the interviewee responses. I kept field notes in my journal. Field notes were used to collect my perceptions while in the field, including observations, and thoughts on the data I collected (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). A personal journal is beneficial for qualitative research as it may reveal unrecognized biases, reactions, or feelings (Yin, 2002).

Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995) analysis is "a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). Each interview, including the photo elicitation portion, was transcribed after completion. Transcription can be very complex because people do not always speak in logical, coherent sentences so making sure the transcription is accurate can be quite time consuming (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I initially used the Zoom closed captioning function to assist with transcription. Zoom provided the starting point, but I later decided to use a website called Rev to assist with the transcriptions. After the transcriptions were finished, I reviewed each interview for accuracy in the transcription. I then read each interview three times in an unbiased manner to gain a full understanding of the data. Once I became immersed in the data the

coding process began. Stake (1995) describes two strategies to analyze data: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Direct interpretation uses an individual instance for interpretation, while categorical aggregation takes multiple instances until something can be concluded about them (Stake, 1995). This case study used categorical aggregation to understand student experiences.

Coding

All interviews were coded using a first cycle technique (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Process coding was the initial coding technique used when reviewing the data. Process coding captured wide-ranging concepts throughout the data. When determining which type of coding to use, it was necessary to find alignment with the research questions, with methodology, and goals of the research (Saldana, 2016). Process coding was appropriate for this study since the research explores personal experiences as well as processes and perceptions (Saldana, 2016). Process coding was applied when re-reading the interviews for transcription to detect primary concepts.

Second cycle coding was used to classify, prioritize, synthesize data and to extract the themes identified throughout (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding was employed to condense the large amounts of original data into more manageable themes which allowed a more concise explanation of the data (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding was appropriate to use to compare the data from multiple interviews. The key concepts seen in the data in the first cycle, process coding, were further examined and broken down into more concise concepts and coded accordingly. The data was then placed into categories and reduced to recurring themes. A theme explains the patterns seen throughout the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Themes are different from codes because they are often

created from the codes, in other words, themes are outcomes of coding (Saldana, 2016). I utilized Microsoft Excel to code and track themes.

To produce trustworthy and credible findings, I triangulated the data. Interviews, photo elicitation, and my journal were used in triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple data sources to confirm or clarify the diversities of perception (Stake, 2005). According to Stake (1995) there are four types of triangulation. These include data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data source triangulation is seeing if the case remains the same at varying times (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), investigator triangulation is having other researchers look at the case, similarly, theory triangulation has other researchers or colleagues examine the case from a different theory. Lastly, methodological triangulation uses multiple methods within a method or between methods (Stake, 1995). Methodological triangulation is the form that I used for this study through semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative validity means that the study findings are accurate because certain procedures have been used (Creswell, 2014). Member checking, or sharing the study data with the study participants, was done once I had a draft of the fourth chapter, but prior to sharing with my dissertation chair. According to Stake (2004), member checking is providing the opportunity to object if they feel something is misrepresented. I shared chapter four with study participants via email, allowing them time to read it and share feedback through email or by scheduling a meeting if preferred by the study participant. Sharing chapter four provided the opportunity for the interviewees to review the data, and

an opportunity to correct, or elaborate on the findings further (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I did not get a response from any of the study participants, which I interpreted as agreement with the representation of their interviews throughout chapter four. Other reasons participants may not have responded might because they did not want to take the time to read the chapter, or because they did not have anything new to add (Stake, 1995). I paid close attention to inference quality, this is a term for evaluating the conclusions drawn from the data and the degree to which the findings could be applied to other settings, people, or contexts (Teddlie & Tahakkori, 2009). These steps were essential for data analysis; Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) recommend choosing major themes that surface throughout the study and following up on strong results.

Role of the Researcher

As the first in my family to attend college, I understand the challenges that come with being a first-generation college student. My dad was the person who encouraged me to attend college, but not for the same reasons as many parents encourage their children. My dad's motivation stemmed from his desire for me to continue my softball career, and hopefully earn a softball scholarship. I chose the college I attended based on the amount of fun I had during my recruiting visit, not the wisest strategy as I look back. Similarly, I had not had a conversation with anyone about which major or career I would be interested in pursuing. My high school guidance counselor told my dad I was not cut out for college, so this clearly was not a conversation my guidance counselor had with me. So, when making the decision about my major, I chose physical education, at the suggestion of the softball coach who was recruiting me. I did not know changing my major was even an option until my roommate did so late in our sophomore year.

I was recently asked if I was Pell-eligible when I attended college. I still do not know the answer to that, my father completed my FAFSA for me. What I do know is that I earned a partial softball scholarship but still had student loans that were taken out in my name. I worked my entire college career to pay for my books, have spending money, and even pay for my rent once I moved off campus my junior year. One semester when I did not have the money to pay my term bill, I was dropped from the courses I was registered for, and for that reason could not even practice with my softball team. My father did everything he could to find the money to pay my bill, but his credit was not good enough to qualify for a loan, so he borrowed money from his boss. So, while I am not sure if I was Pell-eligible, I do know that money was an issue for our family, like many others.

Around the start of my sophomore year, my mother moved out of the home she shared with my dad, only telling me she was leaving about a week before. She took our family dog, which at the time was devastating. A few short months after my mom moved out, my dad met someone new, and she moved into the house. This impacted me in many ways, including my academics, how I interacted with my friends, teammates, and of course my family. I include the part about my parent's divorce to demonstrate my understanding of some of the challenges that students encounter while working towards their degree, and how these challenges can find their way into the classroom.

After I completed my degree in physical education, I taught at a first grade through twelfth grade boarding school which began as a school for White, orphaned boys. By the time I started working there, the school evolved to include mostly Black and Latinx students, both male and female. The students attending came from single parent or no parent families and were admitted based on financial need. While I found I disliked

teaching physical education, I found a passion for working with and learning about minoritized populations. This experience, along with other experiences I had along the way, let me to my position as Early Intervention Advisor at the location of this study.

At the research institution, much emphasis has been placed on student retention and the development of support programs and interventions with the intent of supporting students who may not persist without that support. My previous full-time role at the institution as Early Intervention Advisor was created as an additional such support for students. Currently, I still work with the early intervention program but also oversee the Tutoring Center and Success Coaching Program. I did serve as an adjust faculty member for the course in past years, but recently decided to step away from the role because my time would no longer permit me to teach. Because of my past involvement with student support services, and specifically with the CSC program, I will need to pay close attention to my biases. For this case study, remembering that truth is dependent on perspective will be paramount (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Since the information gleaned from the research could create an emotional response, I will keep a reflective journal of the research process to keep a critical perspective (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2015). Keeping a reflective journal can create transparency in the research process and bring to light my unconscious thoughts for further examination (Ortlipp, 2008).

Limitations and Delimitations

While this study will help address questions surrounding the CSC at Suburban 101, limitations are inevitable. One limitation is the age of students, since this study only looked at first-semester freshmen students who are aged 18 to 24; non-traditional aged and transfer students were not studied. Suburban 101 does offer transfer sections for the

course, so the findings will not be applicable to those students. A delimitation is that the findings will be specific to Suburban 101, and since each institution implements their programs differently, the findings may not be able to be generalized. This study alone will not account for all variables impacting a student's academic performance as a magnitude of factors that influence a student's ability and willingness to persist in college far beyond the scope one single study could possibly measure.

From my own experience in higher education, it is the most engaged students who are looking at their university email on a daily basis. The students who responded the fastest, were the students who were included in the study. For these reasons, we can assume that the students who participated in the study are engaged in the University generally, but also concerned with their academic success. Second, the subject line for the email asking students to participate mentioned the $25 Wawa gift card they would get by participating in the study. Students who most need the money were more than likely the students to offer to participate. This might skew study participation to students who were in greater financial need due to sample bias.

This study was also time bound, examining students' experiences in the course for one semester, but not looking at their experiences through four years or degree completion. A prolonged study would have allowed for more reflection by study participants based on a longer period. A study that would allow students to reflect on their experience in Suburban 101 after a longer time at the institution might gain additional insight. Furthermore, a small sample size of nine students is only that, the experiences of the nine students interviewed, and therefore lacks generalizability.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention my previous role as a Suburban 101 instructor and early involvement with the course in the limitations and delimitations section as well as my role as the researcher. While I attempted to remove all bias from research findings and approach my research with objectivity, I had connections and positive views of the course since its inception, which influence my role as the researcher and must be mentioned in this section.

Ethical Considerations

I complied with all policies and procedures to ensure that the study meets ethical and legal standards of research at the study location. I completed the online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program to enhance my knowledge and understanding in the conduct of ethical and responsible research. Prior to the start of the study, this dissertation proposal was reviewed and approval by the dissertation committee to ensure quality and integrity of the study, as required at the research site. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the risk of the study to participants. A stamp of IRB approval serves to protect the rights and welfare of students as participants (Creswell, 2014). I was clear in communicating the protections provided by the IRB to study participants. To actualize this, I received informed consent from each prospective student participant, respecting confidentiality and anonymity of students. Additionally, I protected the privacy of research data, and ensured no greater than minimal risk on the students. Lastly, any written reports of the study will properly acknowledge sources as well as not include any identifying or personal information of students such as actual names or email addresses. As an employee at the research site who used to be involved in the CSC, I exercised clear boundaries in my job responsibilities and the conduct of the

study. I only requested voluntary participation from students and did not use my authority to influence their decision to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

I utilized participant interviews to gain insight into student characteristics that lead to college persistence. With the use of interviews, participant identity will be known only by me. As the researcher, I have protected the names and identities of study participants while keeping identifiable roles private (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). All participants were informed of Suburban University's IRB protections.

I kept Zoom audio recorded interviews on a password protected computer, and transcriptions of the interviews also on a password protected computer. Participant names, and demographic information also remained on a password protected computer. In another effort to maintain confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym once interviews had been transcribed.

Risks

I did everything I could to minimize harm and maximize good outcomes for study participants (Lapan, et al., 2012). I did my best to make sure interviewees were as comfortable as possible through engaged, supportive listening. While this study involved minimal risk, some participants may have experienced discomfort as they described barriers to success, or their own characteristics. Interviewees were made aware that they do not have to answer all questions, can take a break as needed, and can stop the interview entirely, if desired.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methods I used to explore the experiences of first-generation, Pell-eligible Black and Latinx students who were enrolled in a college success course at Suburban University. This study used a case study research design using semi-structured in-depth interviews, and photo elicitation. Purposeful criterion sampling, followed by convenience sampling was used when selecting study participants. Data collected was transcribed and coded using process coding followed by pattern coding. To ensure validity, I triangulated the data from the different sources, and used member checking. Confidentiality of the study participants was respected, with all data locked and stored on a password protected computer.

Chapter 4

Findings

Understanding the experiences of minoritized students in a college success course at Suburban University is the focus of my study. Since the course was implemented, there has been no formal examination of the course and how students perceive it, so this study intends to fill that gap. Chapter four presents the findings from this study, including the narratives of the students interviewed. I interviewed nine students, four female students, and five male students who identify as either Black or Latinx. All nine of the students were also Pell-eligible and first-generation students, 18-24 years old. Each study participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy. Interviews were semi-structured and included a photo-elicitation portion embedded within the interview. This chapter presents a brief introduction to each participant, and then presents themes that were pulled from the data collected.

Table 1

Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	**Gender**	**Race**
Ashanti	Female	Black
Kalea	Female	Latinx
Harmony	Female	Latinx
Karla	Female	Black
Elijah	Male	Latinx
Abdul	Male	Black
Ivan	Male	Black
Justice	Male	Mixed race (Black & White)
Gabriel	Male	Latinx

Participants

I was able to schedule interviews with a few students after my first email attempt but had to follow-up with multiple outreach attempts before securing all nine of the interviews. Each email used the subject line offering $25 Wawa gift card to participate in a study. There was one student who did not show for an interview, and there was another that needed to be rescheduled. I was able to secure interviews with female participants more quickly than male participants, so I needed to intentionally target my secondary outreach attempts to male students. I arranged the interviews to take place in study rooms on the fourth floor of the campus library. This served as a neutral, rather central location that most students on campus have some familiarity with and they know the location of the library. The study rooms have glass walls and windows, making it possible to view students as they approach and walk by the space.

Kalea

As the first student walked past the glass to the study room, I could see she was a petite young woman who looked a little apprehensive as she approached. I waived to her, opened the door, and by the time I introduced myself, the student seemed to relax and flashed a smile that could light up the room. Kalea, a psychology major, seemed eager to learn what the interview would be like, and open to sharing her Suburban University experiences with me. Kalea made the decision to attend Suburban University because her brother was already attending. Her family also had safety concerns, as this was Kalea's first time being away from home, and being near her brother added a sense of security. Kalea described her experiences as a minoritized person, as something that motivates her continue at Suburban University. She described attending college as an opportunity that

others around her have not had, and she has a feeling of gratitude for having the chance to earn a college degree. She said, “the experiences I’ve had being a minority, seeing how others haven’t had those opportunities, it inspires me, it pushes me, it makes me.” She continued by saying “it makes me passionate to keep going so that I can help others in the future.” As we moved through the early questions in the interview, Kalea praised her experiences in the Suburban 101 course as well as her experiences at the University in general. Kalea’s family lives local to the Suburban University campus so she is commuting to school.

When talking about the college success course, Kalea suggested that the instructor encouraged her class to be involved, especially through a required assignment that made them attend events on campus. She also said the instructor introduced the class to resources such as writing tutoring and the campus food pantry.

Ashanti

My second interview, a student named Ashanti, confidently walked up to and in the study room, opening the door with a degree of authority. She introduced herself and we started chatting right away about her day. I thanked her for her time, and willingness to meet with me. She seemed eager to participate in the study. When asked about her decision to attend Suburban University, Ashanti described the cost and the location as the two main factors contributing to her choice, Suburban University had given her the best financial aid package which was very important. Ashanti said “I live 20 minutes away, it was very convenient to just come here and go to school, and also the financial aid was good enough for me to choose here.” Ashanti had wanted to stay close to home to attend college, and Suburban University was what she described as “very local.” Just like

Ashanti walked into the study room for the interview with a purpose, she described her decision to come to Suburban University as a psychology major as her purpose, as she has known she has wanted to pursue psychology since she was a sophomore in high school. Ashanti shared that her biology teacher in high school played a role in her decision to want to be a psychology major, as she had learned about the psychology field in one of her classes. Ashanti said,

> well, I really have a passion for psychology. I always wanted to be a counselor. So I'm pursuing that, I knew since seventh grade. I remember telling my biology teacher like, "I'm going to get there" I knew, so I just continued with that to pursue and get my degree.

Since she has been at Suburban University, Ashanti's desire to pursue psychology has not wavered. Ashanti is living on campus. When discussing her experiences within the college success course, Ashanti mentioned learning about resources such as tutoring and success coaching. She also mentioned learning about the writing tutoring on campus as well as how to better manage her time.

Justice

Justice, my next interview, also walked into the study room with confidence. He did not seem intimidated at all, and appeared genuinely relaxed before he casually opened the door. Justice spoke with an accent that sounded like he was from New York. He presented a hard exterior, someone who seemed tough, like he had been some through some challenges. During our interview, I learned that Justice had gone through more in his 18 or 19 years than a lot of people go through in their lifetime. Justice had moved to Newark, New Jersey after his parents split up, his dad abandoned his family, and his mom

struggled with drug addiction. Justice and his brother moved to New Jersey to live with their cousin, who was already a single mother of three children of her own. When describing what motivates Justice to continue his college education, he talked about doing better for himself than his parents were able to do for him. He is using his circumstances growing up as his motivation to find success and happiness. When talking about his cousin who took him and his siblings in, Justice said "she already had three kids of her own. She took in four kids. She's like everything, she's working 8:00am to 8:00pm, and sometimes later, sometimes on weekends." Finding happiness that was something else that struck me about Justice. As someone who described himself as being very good at math, he was not pursuing a high paying career in finance or engineering, rather he is a math education major with a strong passion for helping others. When talking about why he chose education, Justice said "envisioning myself as a teacher, I like to think one day after I'm finished school, I'll be able to help people out." He feels he will be best suited to teach middle school math, so he could give kids a head start. Because Justice lives about two hours from campus, he is living on campus.

When discussing his experiences within the college success course, Justice mentioned the group work and projects, as well as group working sessions as something he enjoyed. He also said that learning about the library website, and the online instructional platform was helpful when he first started at Suburban University.

Ivan

When Ivan walked into the study room, he was wearing a Suburban University track suit with matching pants and jacket. I asked right away if he was a student-athlete and he told me he is a member of the track team at Suburban University. I tried to build

connection with him by discussing my past experiences working with the Suburban University athletic department and was able to mention the name of his coach, and the success of the team in recent years. The more we talked about the track team, the more he seemed to settle in and we were able to connect rather quickly through the discussion of sport. Ivan, a computer science major, described the reason he chose Suburban University was for the quality track program and for the location being relatively close to home. He described his connection with the track coach, and how the success of the program was a draw for him. He wanted to be part of a successful track program while continuing his education. Ivan shared that the track coach stresses the importance of academics, he said, "school work is embedded into track and coach is always available if I need anything." As a motivating factor for continuing his education at Suburban University, Ivan said that he wanted more for his family then he had as he was growing up. Ivan lives on campus.

Ivan said he was able to connect with his professor in his college success course really well, he said that his instructor was caring and supportive. He also said the course required him to go to different events that he would not have gone to without the assignment of attending different events. Ivan also learned about clubs he could get involved with on campus.

Karla

Karla entered the study room, seemingly uncertain if she was in the correct place. I quickly introduced myself and thanked her for taking the time for the interview. She was gracious, seemingly eager to help. Karla described her decision to attend Suburban University as a rushed decision, as she was not certain where she wanted to go or even if she wanted to attend college. She said that she enrolled very last minute but mentioned

the ease of enrolling despite that. She shared “the process was so easy, and it was just a smooth process and at the end, it was a good decision.” She ended up selecting Suburban University because of the proximity to home, and because she knew others attending the University who had positive experiences. Despite the proximity to home, Karla lives on campus. Karla explained that she loves to “play keys”, meaning to play the piano. At Suburban University, Karla has joined an organization that provides the opportunity to play instruments along with other University students. I learned early in the interview that Karla enjoys sports and is a fan of the local professional sports teams. Her love for athletics led her towards her major in Sports Communication to pursue a career in a large sports organization after graduation.

When discussing her experience in the course, Karla highlighted her connection with the professor. She said she felt seen and heard by the professor. She also said that she felt that her instructor wanted to see her succeed and she could feel that.

Gabriel

My sixth interview was with a young man named Gabriel. Gabriel went to high school about 30 minutes from Suburban University’s campus and was encouraged to attend by his cousin already attending the University who was planning to graduate in May of the year of the interview. Gabriel also explained that his mother did not want him to go too far from home to pursue his degree, so the combination of the two factors contributed to his decision to attend Suburban University. Suburban University made sense to Gabriel because it allowed him to commute to save money on housing costs associated with living on campus. Gabriel also shared that he visited campus to take a tour before deciding to enroll and he really liked it, he said “I liked the environment, the

boulevard, and the little walkway". Gabriel wants to pursue a career as a police officer and was already in the process of joining the Marines, scheduled to leave for boot camp in June of 2023. Gabriel shared that he was nervous to go away, and that he was already mentally preparing himself for when the time came. The reason for pursing a degree was so he could become a staff sergeant or earn higher rank, which he explained only becomes possible with a college degree. Gabriel said, "I want to become corporal and staff sergeant, so I'll need to get my Master's degree, so I'm pushing that way." Gabriel elected to enter college as a computer science major, but later decided to change to law and justice, which aligned more closely with his career goals.

Gabriel also mentioned the course as a way to connect with other students as well as the professor. He said that learning how to use the online scheduling system to schedule tutoring and advising appointments was beneficial. He mentioned that he learned about the success coaching program through the course and utilized that service throughout the semester.

Abdul

The next interview was with Abdul. He came to the interview dressed in business casual clothing, seeming to treat the interview more like a professional job interview than the other students I had interviewed to that point. He chose to attend Suburban University for the cost compared to other schools, and because he wanted to pursue a business career and he liked the reputation of Suburban's Business School. Abdul shared that he had been interested in one other school, but the financial aid package was not as good as the one offered by Suburban University. He also liked the campus size of Suburban University compared to the other smaller, private schools he had been considering and the location,

which is only about 15 minutes away from home. Abdul is commuting to campus, which made the location of the campus even more important and being able to commute made the cost of attending college more affordable for him. About Suburban University, Abdul said “they gave me the most amount of scholarship money and they have a really good business program.” While Abdul is a true first year student, he had taken a couple years off from school due to the passing of his father in 2020 and because he was not sure what he wanted to do for a career. During his time away from school, Abdul worked for UPS. While working, Abdul was able to narrow his career path to business, as he found interest there, and he felt a business career would allow him to financially support his family, which he noted as a driving factor for him to enroll and continue in higher education. He shared “So, now I know what I want to do, and I know that I want to provide for my family, for the future. So, that’s the main thing that’s driving me.” Abdul mentioned wanting to support his mother and his sister specifically.

Abdul mentioned learning about skills that can be used anywhere in life, not just in college at a benefit to the course. Specifically, he mentioned budgeting and managing his time. He also said that learning about the many volunteer opportunities on campus was eye opening for him and something he planned to participate in during future semesters. He also mentioned how easy his professor was to speak with, and how his professor tried to make the course interesting through group activities.

Elijah

Elijah entered the study room with energy and enthusiasm. He smiled a large bright smile and seemed happy to participate in the interview. He was dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. When deciding where to attend college, Elijah made the

decision based on the campus being close to home and being just the right size. He said "it was the closest to where my hometown was, and I actually like the campus. It was not too big but not too small." Elijah, a psychology major, was looking for a mid-sized institution, not a small college or giant university. Suburban University's proximity to his hometown allows him to commute to school and save money on housing costs. Pressure from his parents was something that Elijah mentioned, although he said he recognized their pressure was because they want what is best for him, and they believe that getting a degree was that path for him. When talking about what motivates him to attend college, Elijah shared "first, it would be my parents because they didn't get the education that I have right now. I just feel really pressured, and I just want to commit to give back to my parents and obtain a good job." Later in the interview, Elijah mentioned his father specifically, saying that everything Elijah does is for his father. He also revealed that his father is a single parent who is working long hours to support him and is paying for his college attendance. He said while his father often was not there for him physically as he was growing up, his father was always there to give him advice and to emotionally support him. Elijah's dream is to be able to financially support his father so he can stop doing the physical labor of this home remodeling job and allow his body to heal. About his family, he said "I want to give them the life that they deserve at the end of the day." He continued by saying "I don't want to see them suffer and I want to give them the life that they deserve at the end of the day."

In the college success course, Elijah liked the speakers that came to talk to his class. He thought having people from across different departments on campus was helpful in getting to know the resources that are available. He also said that seeing people from

the offices made him feel more comfortable to try utilizing them. Elijah said he learned about the study abroad program through the course and would love to study abroad in the future if he was able.

Harmony

Harmony entered the study room seeming a little bit nervous and unsure. She was soft spoken, and quiet as we began to talk about our interview and what she could expect. When we began to talk about her decision to come to Suburban University, she explained that one of the reasons she went further from home to attend school is because the area she is from is not nice, and she wanted to create a good life for herself. About her decision to attend Suburban University, Harmony shared "It was one of the few colleges I actually visited, but it's just two hours from my hometown. I wanted to get away." Attending Suburban University allowed her to live on campus, rather than staying at home and commuting. Harmony also explained that financial considerations were also important when making her decision on which college to attend and Suburban University was the most affordable option. She explained that she wanted to attend college so she can "have a good life." When I later asked Harmony what creating a good life means to her, she said that she would like to get a full-time job and have financial security. When we talked further, I learned that Harmony is majoring in Computer Science, and would like to pursue a high paying job in that field. During our conversation, it was clear that Harmony's family had faced financial challenges throughout her life, and she wanted something different from her future. Financial security is a driving factor in pursuing a college degree.

During her experience in the college success course, Harmony described group assignments and working together with other students as something she enjoyed doing. She said the group assignments made class more interesting and enable her to get to know other students from the class.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were concluded, I had them transcribed through a website called Rev. Once transcription was complete, I printed each interview transcription and read through each interview three times. As I read through the interviews, it provided an opportunity to reflect on my conversations, and remind me of the situations of the participants I interviewed. This repeated reflection of the interviews allowed for me to notice similarities that I had not noticed during the actual interview process although during the interviews, I could detect some consistencies in what students were saying, but reviewing the transcripts multiple times made the similarities more pronounced in my mind. Next, I began process coding. This is the first round of coding that I used when looking through my data. This involved looking for words that described some type of action; words ending in "ing" (Saldana, 2021). I did this by making written notes on my paper, documenting action words as I reread the interviews. I then made a list in Excel of all the action words that were spoken during the interviews. One word frequently used by study participants, specifically Ashanti, Abdul, Justice, and Ivan was the word "learning", when saying they were learning about resources, or learning about learning styles, or learning about student loans. Another word used frequently was "going", when students said they were going to events, going to Suburban After Hours, or going to tutoring. After finding words like these that communicated some form of action, ending in "ing", I used

pattern coding, a second cycle coding, to group that data into themes. To do this type of coding, I used an Excel spreadsheet to easily track student responses. The process of pattern coding allowed me to identify similarities more easily in the student experience expressed by the students interviewed. The themes that emerged include: the importance of faculty, learning about resources, and the role of self.

I used the same type of coding, process and pattern coding, when reading through the photo elicitation portion of the interviews. While the photos were used to elicit additional information from the interviewees, the coding of their responses worked the same as for the regular interview questions. The themes that emerged through the interviews included the importance of faculty, self-motivation, learning about resources, and the importance of relationships. The importance of faculty and the role the faculty played in the students' transition was made clear throughout each interview. The person instructing the class is hugely impactful for the students enrolled in the course. This closely ties to Schlossberg's Transition Theory and the importance of support. Faculty provided the support students need in the challenging transition.Self-motivation continued to be mentioned throughout the interviews as students were able to credit themselves for their ability to persist. This is impactful as students recognized their own contribution to their success and their own positive characteristics to continue in college when it is not always the easiest choice. This is particularly powerful when coming from minoritized students, as so often they are viewed by others from a deficit lens. For students to see their strengths when reflecting on their successes is meaningful. This also ties to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, specifically the strategies component, which includes a person's ability to cope and adapt to a transition. Furthermore, learning about

resources available was mentioned throughout the interviews. Repeatedly, students said that the only way they would learn about all the services and resources available to them is through participation in the course. Lastly, during the photo elicitation portion of the interview, the importance of relationships was echoed repeatedly. Interestingly, relationships with anyone other than faculty were rarely mentioned in the interviews except during the photo elicitation portion. For some students, their relationships at home were most important, and for others, they were looking to build relationships in their new environment.

Presentation of Themes

Importance of Faculty

The first theme was that the professors played an important role in the students' experiences in the course. Of the students interviewed, eight of the students specifically spoke about the positive role the professor played in their transition to Suburban University. Karla mentioned she was able to build a positive relationship with her professor because the professor seemed relatable and easy to talk to. She said her professor presented information in a clear way, so it was easy to understand. Kalea described her professor as being "awesome," and specifically mentioned the interactive dynamics of the course that provided the opportunity to connect with other students in the class. She said,

> I really liked the way [Frank] taught because it was interactive, it wasn't just "look at this, hear my works", it was like "what are you guys dealing with, what are you struggling with?" and then he would give these options, these visuals, and I was really moved by it because before I would have trouble asking for help or

> seeing that I have some value in my words. So being able to speak up and participate, I think I participated most in that class.

Her instructor often took time out of teaching content, to ask students what issues they were dealing with, and provided action steps and resources they could use to help with their specific problems. Kalea's professor also asked the students why they were attending Suburban University, and where their motivating drive to earn a college education came from. Kalea mentioned this as something that reminded her of her desire to be different than others in her family and motivated her to earn her degree. Abdul mentioned the ability of the professor to get everyone in the class to participate, which cultivated a positive learning environment. He shared that "because a lot of the topics were relatable, mostly everyone participated. It cultivated an environment where no one just sat there." He enjoyed how the professor kept things interactive through group work, and the use of presenters from different departments. He said, "my teacher cultivated an environment where no one felt like they couldn't share what they were going through." When asked what stood out for him about the Suburban 101 course, Gabriel said,

> I think the teacher stood out the most, because I feel like she was really engaged, and she really seemed like she did want to help students, and want to see people succeed, and get out there and do thing and experience things, and go to different events, she would get us to go out, or give us all the information about upcoming events, like [Suburban Late Night]…I didn't know about that. I didn't know how to search events, or career fairs. She showed us all kinds of stuff like that. She seemed really engaged, just in general.

The examples provided throughout the interviews demonstrated how important faculty are in the experiences of the students enrolled in their courses. For this particular course, the faculty had a positive influence on students by creating a friendly environment where students felt comfortable to express themselves and share meaningful dialogue with one another which eased these transitions.

Self-Motivation

Students described similar answers for what or who motivates them to continue, and what characteristics they have. Most recognized their own ability to persist, their determination and their strength was their motivation and ability to continue. Every student except Elijah mentioned themselves as the reason they persisted. Ashanti said, "I keep myself going. Did you ever see the video with Snoop Dog and he was like, 'I would like to congratulate myself' I'm the one that wants to do it, so I'm doing it for me." She continued by saying, "I am very strong minded, I think that helps me in the long run." Abdul said "I would say myself, honestly. Yeah, I've been the kind of the one that made the decision to go to college. I think it's just me that I should probably go, yeah, I was the main part of it, but I'm also making myself continue, because I [have] this opportunity… I don't want to screw it up." He also mentioned the importance of

> Perseverance and a sense of focus. The past few years have been very, very hard. So, going through that made me realize, I've been through the worst of the worst for me. I don't think it would get much worse if it happens in the future, so, I could probably get through it, because I got through that, and I can get through this, that's probably why I'm motivated to continue."

For context, prior to saying this, Abdul had shared that he lost his father prior to attending Suburban University.

Similarly, Elijah said,

> I'm really determined. I like being myself, like when I'm focused, just being by myself and just doing the work. I'm really determined to complete the work as good as possible, like, I'm willing to give it my all. I'm not the type of person to just give up, [I] actually try and go for it.

Justice said, "I won't stay down, when life beats me up, I just keep moving." Ivan described himself as having the ability to keep his piece of mind, he said "I don't really freak out, lose control, stress much, so I deal with things by staying calm, and that helps." Karla attributes her ability to advocate for herself as one of her characteristics that helps her persist. She said, "[Suburban University] has a lot to offer, but it's a matter of just going out there to get it." Kalea shared that while she could attribute her success to her family or to God, she said, "I owe it to myself to believe that 'Hey, I got this far, so I'm going to put the work [in] to keep going.'"

The words expressed by the students show that self-motivation is valuable in student success. These students have been able to find the value and strength within themselves to continue to push toward their goals and dreams without being hindered by circumstances.

Learning about Resources

Each of the nine individuals I interviewed mentioned learning about resources available on campus while they were in the course. The resources they mentioned varied, but included things such as study abroad, counseling, and psychological services, career

services, tutoring, and success coaching, all of which can assist in the transition from high school to college. Also mentioned were social offerings, such as late-night programming, sport clubs and intramurals, and other student run clubs. Multiple students also mentioned learning about the food pantry, and the office for volunteering. Gabriel mentioned learning about an online scheduling platform at Suburban University and how to use that to schedule different appointments, including success coaching. When speaking about success coaching, he said "It kind of keeps you on track, because they'll give you little goals and stuff like that." Gabriel also mentioned that he learned about the many mental health resource on campus. He said, "I learned about mental health resources a lot, and how we could go to see somebody." During each of the interviews, participants mentioned an area of content they were taught in the course as being useful. These included time management, budgeting, learning styles, and the impact of student loans and loan repayment. Justice said,

> For me, so, tutoring. My teacher taught me about tutoring, so I definitely used tutoring every night, every other week. I also did a virtual tour on campus, so I definitely know all the buildings right now because of that.

Harmony said, "I learned about the food pantry; I would never have found out if it wasn't for that class and I actually go." Similarly, Harmony said tutoring is another resource she's learned about from the course, she said "I go to walk-in computer science tutoring most of the time," and she said she learned how to schedule that during her college success course. Abdul learned about the Career Office on campus and made frequent visits, he said "I went there to get formal resume review and to get information about careers through the business school."

Kalea said, “My teacher was [Frank]. He definitely provided every resource on this campus and I love that class. It was my favorite because every time I went, there wasn’t something I didn’t learn.” She continued by saying “every time I went it was like, ‘oh, I need that’, or, ‘let me go find out what that is.’ And it pushed me to be [as] involved as I am now on campus.” Ashanti said, “I use the writing center, sometimes I’ll schedule an appointment with someone just so they can either answer my questions, or they can revise any of my papers.” Karla said she benefitted from the course because “it was telling us stuff we can actually go to and use, like [the food pantry], was a really good thing to know about.” It became evident throughout the interviews that learning about the resources available on campus was helpful to students as they transitioned college and adjusted to new expectations being placed upon them. Without participation in the course, it might take students much longer to learn about the available resources if they were to learn about them at all.

Importance of Relationships

During the interview, mid-way through, I asked participants to look at eight photographs related to attending college, or the transition to college, and choose the two photographs that best represented their transition to Suburban University. This process is called photo elicitation and is included in an interview to bring about additional insights and stimulate reflection (Blackwell, et., al, 2006; Prosser & Loxley, 2008).The participants seemed interested in this, and the change within the interview appeared welcome. When presented with the photographs, students were thoughtful when making their choices, taking their time to look through the photographs. Once they selected their

photographs from the eight options, I asked them to share their reasons for choosing each of the pictures they selected.

This portion of the interview brought out the consistent theme of relationships, whether it be relationships the students had with their families, friends at home, or relationships they hoped to build during their time at Suburban University. In most of the interviews, families or building relationships had not come up at all during the interview to that point, so it was intriguing for almost all of them to mention their families, or people they were close with during the photo elicitation portion of the interview even though the photographs selected varied between participants. Gabriel selected photo number four, which seems to show a mom and daughter hugging near the trunk of a car, the daughter is holding a cardboard box that says, "dorm room". The person who one might assume is the mother, appears both proud and sad at the same time. Gabriel said "It's symbolic to me and my mom because she never went to college, and neither did my older sister. So, it was a sentimental moment. She really just sat there and she was just flabbergasted, I guess." He continued, "I don't know, she was in the moment, and just taking everything in. So, it's very symbolic. It makes me happy when I think about it though, because I know she's proud of me." Ashanti also selected photo number four, and said,

> getting away from family was kind of hard at first, especially from my mom. She would call me a lot, but I didn't see it as a bad thing, getting away. I didn't want to make her deal with that (the sadness) every time, that she would call me a lot and tell me she would miss me and stuff, and I really liked it, but it also makes me feel bad, because there's nothing I can do about it, because I live here. I have a lot

> of stuff in my room, and pretty much all of my stuff from my old room is in my room here now.

Elijah selected photo number six, which is a group of four young adults laying on the floor, appearing happy, and a couple of them holding hands in a non-romantic fashion. He said the picture shows the types of relationships he hopes to build, he said "I only had two friends back home, and I was really hoping for more friendships when I arrived at Suburban University." Describing the same photo, Abdul said he was able to

> build relationships with a lot of my friends from class, because after class we would usually hang out. I would hang out with a lot of people from that class. Also, my professor mentioned it's important to have support groups.

Harmony also selected photo number six and shared a similar sentiment about making friends when she said

> I really hope to make a lot of friendships in college and just with people because back in my hometown, I only had two close friends, so, coming here, I want to meet people that really inspire me, so I can continue making more memories and finding people that relate to me.

Photo number eight was similar to number six. This photo showed five young adults sitting on a bench with their arms around each other backs. This was one of Karla's photo selections; she shared about the relationships she's been able to build during his time at Suburban University, she said,

> I feel like I wanted to make connections, especially, like I said, with the students. I've built a few decent connections with two or three specific staff members here at Suburban University. I feel like that over the course of my time here we're

going to get closer and closer together, so that way, afterwards, when I graduate, there's still going to be a decent, strong connection.

Justice also selected photo number eight. He said that "my best friend from home was a big part of me coming here." He continued by saying that he has a lot of trust and respect for my friend. The course encouraged a connection, not only between students and the University, but also between the students within the course.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the experiences of nine minorized students who participated in a college success course at Suburban University. Four themes emerged which included the importance of faculty, self-motivation, learning about resources, and the importance of relationships. These four themes emerged clearly, with the importance of relationships theme being expressed through the photo elicitation portion of the interview. During the photo elicitation portion of the interview, participants appeared to become more relaxed and reflected more on their past experiences while growing up, rather than focusing on their current experience at Suburban University. Each of the participants found value in the course and said it had a positive impact on their transition from high school to college Similarly, all nine of the participants said they would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students. Feelings students used to describe their experience in the course included words such as: "happy", "confident," "joyful," "gratitude" and "life lessons learned."

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This study explored the experiences of minoritized students in a college success course. The course had been offered at the University for several years without any formal evaluation of the course. There were brief surveys and faculty evaluations completed each semester prior to this study, but nothing that was more formalized. This qualitative study interviewed nine students who had been enrolled in the college success course in the fall of 2022. Each of the students were Pell-eligible, first generation, and either Black or Latinx.

The overarching question for this study is *what are the experiences of first-year, full-time Black, Latinx, and Pell-eligible college students enrolled in Suburban 101?,* There are three sub-questions that will help answer this question. They include:

1. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to social transition?
2. How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to academic transition?
3. What contributions, if any, does enrollment in Suburban 101 have on motivation to remain enrolled?

The interviews and photo elicitation helped to answer the three sub-questions and ultimately, I learned a lot about the experiences of the students interviewed in their Suburban 101 course. The information learned during this process will be beneficial for future iterations of the course and will provide valuable feedback to the course administrators. The themes that emerged during the study included the importance of faculty, learning about resources, self-motivation, and during the photo elicitation phase, the theme that clearly emerged was the importance of relationships.

Navigating the higher education experience is a complex and sometimes challenging process. So, while experiences in the course varied for each of the individuals interviewed, participation in the course was a positive experience for the students interviewed and generally proved to be worthwhile and beneficial for these minoritized students.

Discussion of Research

Chapter two of this dissertation reviewed the existing literature related to the transition to college, the best practices, and high impact practices higher education institutions can implement to support the transition, and characteristics of minoritized students entering college. This study, including the results from Chapter Four, explores the experiences of minoritized students enrolled in a college success course specifically at Suburban University. This chapter will further review the four research questions, implications for the future, and limitations of the study.

Literature suggests that students from low-income families are looking to earn a bachelor's degree to advance their socioeconomic status, and this literature was echoed through my student interviews (Cappelli, 2015; Carnevale, et al., 2010; Castleman & Long, 2016). Students said their ability to attend Suburban University was a gift, and a way to do better financially than their parents had been able to do. They mentioned earning their bachelor's degree as something that would open doors for them that were not open to their family previously. For me, it was interesting to hear students talk about their education this way, because I spend much of my workdays talking to students who are squandering the opportunity or who are not able to see attendance at Suburban University through that same lens. Three students interviewed mentioned earning their

degree to be able to take care of their parents or guardians who had supported them.

The literature suggests that first-generation students tend to feel less prepared, frequently worry about financial aid, and fear failing more than their non- first-generation peers (Bui, 2002; Choy, 2001). Through my interviews, I found that feeling less prepared and worrying about paying for college were similar for the students I spoke with. However, they did not talk about a fear of failing, but rather about being a first-generation college student as a motivating factor to be successful. Rather than thinking of themselves through a deficit lens, these students took motivation from being an underdog, wanting to prove to others that they can complete their education. In this paper's literature review, I also focused on first-generation student's weaknesses, rather than a strengths-based approach. The students spoke about their first-generation status as something they were proud of, and something that motivates them to continue, even when things are challenging. Regarding feeling less prepared, there were a few students who mentioned that they had to figure out the entire process of even applying for college by themselves, because they did not have a family member who had been through any of it before (Nichols & Islas, 2016). Those living on campus also had to navigate their housing assignments and meal plans. I would also say that many of the students, although not all, do not have a support system that is aware of the challenges of attending college, or the time commitment it takes to be a successful student. As mentioned in the research about first-generation students, those interviewed felt pressure to be successful students, but to also be good sons and daughters, and in some instances, to be the caregivers, in a sense, for their parent or parents (Bui, 2002; Choy, 2001). While this is something that many students face, it seems to be more relevant to students who are first-generation, and

who are also low-income and need to work to support themselves and their families (Bui, 2002; Choy, 2001, Nichols & Islas, 2016). Research also suggests first generation and low-income students are often trying to work full-time, have housing concerns, and need to commute to campus, characteristics that, together, make the transition to college and college success even more difficult (Unverferth, et al., 2012). Six of the students interviewed were able to live on campus, which makes this a little easier as they are less likely to deal with continual issues at home, or must worry about a long commute, or trying to find parking. Being on campus also allowed the students I interviewed to integrate into the campus culture more easily, which can tend to be more challenging for commuter students (Soria & Roberts, 2021).

The literature suggests that CSCs are administered differently at many institutions, with some requiring the course for all entering students, others require it for specific populations, some have enrolling in the course optional, while other schools may have any combination of the aforementioned (Kimbark, et. al, 2017; Barefoot et al., 2012; Padgett & Keup, 2011). First year students often targeted in CSCs are those who may have been identified as at-risk upon admission (Hoops et al., 2015). At Suburban University, students are enrolled in Suburban 101 based on a multitude of factors, including those deemed most at-risk upon entry, and other populations with unique circumstances, such as student-athletes, students who have not decided on a major, and students interested in going into a health field. There is also a section for transfer students.

Instructors can also differ one institution to another, ranging from student affairs members, current faculty, or academic advisors, among others (Kimbark, et al., 2017). In

almost all instances, class sizes are kept small to allow for greater instructor and student interactions, as well as more meaningful discussions and group activities (Swing, 2002). Some students in this study, specifically Kalea, and Gabriel, even when not sure of expected learning outcomes for the course, found value in the opportunity to discuss the experience of attending college and to practice the skills they will need for success (Hatch, et al., 2018). It could be argued that providing students with the knowledge of how to navigate higher education and develop confidence in the process could be as beneficial as knowledge they gain from participation in the course (Karp & Bork, 2014). Because much is known about the positive impact of these types of freshmen courses, they can be used as the anchor for a comprehensive first-year experience program.

After interviewing the nine students, I would deduce that eight of the nine students do not have a support system that is aware of the challenges of attending college, or the time commitment it takes to be a successful student.

Research Question One

How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to social transition?

The theme of the importance of relationships ties directly into social transition, and how experiences in Suburban 101 contributes to students' feelings about their connections to others. In multiple ways, the course assisted with the social transition. One way that was mentioned frequently throughout the interviews, was the connection the students felt with their faculty. The students felt their professors were caring and understanding, and that brought connection and openness into the class. One such example can be seen in a quote from Gabriel who said:

> I think the teacher stood out the most, because I feel like she was really engaged, and she really seemed like she did want to help students, and want to see people succeed, and get out there and do thing and experience things, and go to different events, she would get us to go out, or give us all the information about upcoming events, like [Suburban Late Night]…I didn't know about that. I didn't know how to search events, or career fairs. She showed us all kinds of stuff like that. She seemed really engaged, just in general.

While not included in the literature review for this study, it is well established that faculty play an important role in the student experience. NSSE (2007) includes meaningful interactions with faculty in their list of the top seven high impact practices. Furthermore, a study by Guzzardo, et. al., (2020) suggests four qualities of faculty that lead to greater student success, these include: creating pedagogical space, being inclusive and aware, being engaged and engaging students, and doing more than teaching (Guzzardo, et. al., 2020). Baker and Griffin (2010) describe faculty as having three distinct roles. The first role as an advisor, meaning they assist students with navigating University rules and regulations, the second role is serving as a mentor, which means exploring future career pathways, and third role as what they call a developer (Baker & Griffin, 2010). A developer, according to their Baker and Griffin (2010) is able to open doors for students by helping them reflect on what they need or want to do and assists in identifying opportunities for the student to develop. From the narrative of the students in the study, it seems that their faculty in Suburban 101 were serving in all three roles.

The students also said that the course helped them interact with other students in the course through group work and collaborative projects. Harmony said "we did group

assignments and stuff like that and just working together and talking. It was good." Justice shared his similar experience when he said "I liked the group work we did do. We did a couple of group projects, and group work sessions." Students in the interviews mentioned the connections they were able to make with students in the course, and even some even hung out together outside of the classroom, eating together before or after class. During his interview, Adbul said he was able to "build relationships with a lot of my friends from class, because after class we would usually hang out. I would hang out with a lot of people from that class. Also, my professor mentioned it's important to have support groups."

As a course assignment and part of their grade, students in Suburban 101 were required to attend six different events on campus. The six events they were required to attend had to be diverse in nature; including one event specifically that focuses on their social well-being. Another event they were required to attend needed to include their community, which could include any activity on Suburban University's campus. Other events students were required to attend as part of this single assignment included other areas of well-being including an event focusing on their physical well-being and emotional well-being. Often these events had students stepping out of their comfort zone, but frequently they required social interaction with other Suburban University students.

Students also learned about the different offices on campus that provide opportunities for social interaction such as student activities and Suburban Late Night. Suburban Late Night offers programming for students on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights and often include crafts, movies, or other activities. These programs are designed specifically to support students' social well-being. Students are also taught how to use an

online platform that is used by nearly all social organizations and clubs on campus. This online platform is a hub of involvement opportunities and can even be sorted to show any event which is a social event. Students also mentioned that faculty for the course stressed the importance of building relationships with other students, as well as faculty and staff.

Research Question Two

How, if at all, does Suburban 101 contribute to academic transition?

Suburban 101 assists student's academic transition through the introduction of various campus resources, but also through self-reflection and skill building. The students mentioned how their faculty often asked questions about how they were doing and what they felt they needed in the moment. By asking these questions, students were given the opportunity to think about their own progress, but also listen to the challenges and obstacles encountered by other students. For some, this meant feeling less alone. One example of a student learning about resources was when Harmony said "tutoring is another resource she's learned about from the course, she said "I go to walk-in computer science tutoring most of the time".

Reflection can play a role in student success. Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) recognize reflection and integrated learning to promote growth and learning. This type of reflection within a course also allows for students to see first-hand how their experiences prior to college are informing their experiences in the present situation (Bowman, 2022). Having the opportunity to hear the challenges and successes of others within the class also provides an opportunity for students to recognize their own strengths and to gain an understanding of how their own experiences have equipped them for the challenges they encounter (Bowman, 2022).

Also mentioned in assisting in the academic transition was learning about the learning management system, and scheduling systems. The learning management system is where professors input grades, where professors communicate with students, and where most, if not all, of their assignments are submitted. While this may seem like it is very basic, students are not taught how to navigate this platform in any other avenue, and it can become overwhelming to students as they transition to college. The scheduling system students learned about is used across campus by many offices including academic advising, financial aid, accessibility services, tutoring, and success coaching. Without being able to schedule appointments through this system, students are not able to utilize the academic support services they mention being most helpful.

Students were assisted in their academic transition by learning about academic support services available on campus. There were multiple students who mentioned learning about tutoring services, and then actually using those services when needed. Tutoring, as defined by Topping (1996), is helping others learn while also learning yourself. Maxwell (1990) suggests that students who participate in tutoring are likely to remain in college longer than students who do not utilize the service. While tutoring supports students' academic growth, it is also an avenue for students to integrate socially into the University, it can serve as one more connection for students outside of the classroom setting (Thomas, 2006).

Gabriel and Justice mentioned the success coaching program as something they learned about and used. Success coaching is meant to create a judgement free environment for students to discuss their goals and create steps to achieve their goals (Robinson, 2015; Thomas, 2012; Whitworth et. al., 2007). In coaching sessions, success

coaches use active listening, reflection, and the use of powerful questions to trigger self-reflection and action (Whitworth, et. al., 2007). By being introduced to these services early in their academic career, the students will be able to use them during their entire time at Suburban University, and the services are destigmatized early on. When students are introduced to, and utilize support services during their first year, it becomes what they know to do, rather than something that seems foreign or uncomfortable. Being able to navigate these basic things at Suburban University is important to academic success, and absolutely assists with the transition (Robinson, 2015, Thomas, 2012).

Research Question Three

What contributions, if any, does enrollment in Suburban 101 have on motivation to remain enrolled?

While participation in Suburban 101 played an impactful role in students social and academic transition to college, it did not serve as a motivator to stay enrolled. When asked about what motivated them to continue, students mentioned their families, or themselves, and self- motivation as the driving factor. An example of this was talking to Elijah who said

> "I'm really determined. I like being myself, like when I'm focused, just being by myself and just doing the work. I'm really determined to complete the work as good as possible, like, I'm willing to give it my all. I'm not the type of person to just give up, [I] actually try and go for it."

Multiple students wanted to be sure they seized the opportunity being provided to them, as it was not an opportunity that had been awarded to their family members before them.

College success courses are also intended to enhance the academic and social integration of students into their new college setting (Hatch, et. al., 2018, Kimbark, et al., 2017), and the students described this in varying ways throughout the interviews. It seems that the requirement to attend different campus events was something that helped students integrate into the social aspect of campus, and guest speakers visited some classrooms to discuss the different involvement opportunities (Kimbark et. al., 2016; Stovall, 2000). Some students even mentioned the interaction within the classroom, and how that helped them make friends in the class that they hung out with outside of class also (Barefoot, 1992). The students seemed grateful for the opportunity to be enrolled in a university, and more than one student mentioned not wanting to squander the opportunity they feel so fortunate to have. To me, this was telling, as I meet with students every day in my role with the University, who are not taking advantage of their opportunity and do not seem bothered by the money they are wasting by not passing their classes.

It was mentioned often that the students wanted to make their families proud. Some mentioned their mom or dad individually, but the motivation the students felt from wanting to do well for their families was clear throughout the interviews. This is consistent with the literature around first-generation students and minoritized students (Unverferth, et al., 2012).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Examining the experiences of minoritized students in a college success course through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, what seems most applicable is the four domains, referred to as the four Ss (Schlossberg, 2008, Schlossberg, et al, 2011). These include situation, support, self, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2008). Participation in

the Suburban 101 course provided an opportunity for students to reflect on each of the four Ss, and to become more aware of each of these areas in their lives, which is helpful as they navigate their way through it. Schlossberg's Theory considers the opportunity to reflect as *taking stock* or examining a situation and the resources available to assist in that transition (Schlossberg, 2008, Schlossberg, et al, 2011).

Situation refers to the circumstances surrounding the student's entry to college (Schlossberg, 2008); including whether it was planned, or whether coming to Suburban University was their first choice of schools. Many of the students interviewed chose Suburban University because it made sense for them based on location and financial considerations. None of the students I talked with seemed disappointed to be attending Suburban University and none of them mentioned Suburban University as being a back-up school or seemed disappointed with their decision to attend. All but one student had planned to come to Suburban University for the entire summer prior to enrollment, and this surely played into their happiness to be here. If students felt that they wanted to go to a different school, but had to come to Suburban University, there would not be the same level of excitement or commitment to being successful.

Self, based on Schlossberg's Theory (Schlossberg, 2008) includes self-awareness of beliefs, abilities, and attitude. This very closely aligned with the theme that emerged of self-motivation. The students interviewed believed in themselves and felt capable to do the work needed to be successful. The students interviewed felt confident that they could be successful at Suburban University, even if they questioned themselves on occasion. Self can also include the level of resistance or commitment to a transition (Anderston, et.

al., 2012). The students interviewed were absolutely committed to making their experience positive and doing the absolute best they can.

There are two parts to strategies, as described by Schlossberg's Theory, which include knowing what resources are available, and knowing which resources would be most impactful for use (Schlossberg, 2008). The second part is knowing whether to modify the situation, change the meaning of the situation, take control of the situation, or do nothing and ignoring the situation (Schlossberg, 2008). I heard these throughout the interviews as students described learning about the different resources on campus and skills such as time management, and organization. As far as strategies, the course directly taught students about the resources available to them on campus, and based on what the students were experiencing at that moment, the students could decide which resources would be most valuable for them at the time. Multiple students mentioned using the resources they learned about in the course. Students also had the knowledge of the available resources for the future and would be able to utilize them if there became a time when they would be helpful. Lightner, et al. (2011) says that lack of knowledge of resources available and lack of understanding the procedures for requesting resources prohibits students seeking support services.

The last S is support. According to Schlossberg (2008), support can include intimate relationships, family units, friends, and institutions. The importance of this was clearly demonstrated during the photo elicitation portion of the interview with the theme of the importance of relationships being evident. Each student interviewed talked about how they were impacted by their upbringing, or the support systems they have from family members, or the importance of making friendships. Other students even

mentioned their professors or friends they have on campus as being pivotal in their experiences on campus.

For the faculty teaching this course, applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory can help to better understand the obstacles students are encountering, and also help students in navigating those challenges (Schlossberg, 2008). Furthermore, Schlossberg (2008) suggests that students need to know where to find support, and when they know the support is available from faculty teaching their courses, it makes it much easier to find.

Implications

Practice

All Suburban 101 students are required to take a Suburban Seminar as a graduation requirement but are not required to have Suburban 101.The difference between the suburban seminar and suburban 101 is that Suburban Seminar courses are supposed to embed the information about campus resources and the transition to college into the course curriculum, while Suburban 101 courses are strictly focused on information about the transition. However, due to the nature of the University and the use of adjunct faculty in some departments, often introduction of key concepts can be left out of Suburban Seminars that are included within the CSCs that have the transition content embedded within curriculum.

The selected course instructors for Suburban 101 are also extremely important, and instructors should be selected who are deeply caring about student success. Faculty members for this course need to understand the purpose of the course and should understand the students who are enrolled within the University and their needs. While many instructors have strict deadlines, and are inflexible in accepting assignments, this

type of philosophy may not always be conducive to students who are transitioning to college. Many students are coming from a high school that allowed them to turn assignments in late, without penalty, and teachers and care givers were reminding them of homework assignments and tests. Furthermore, first year students are still learning the various systems the University uses to post and submit assignments, which can be confusing and overwhelming. While the Suburban 101 course can help with navigating those challenges, it can take some time for students to adjust. Furthermore, there are students enrolled in the University who had Individualized Education Plans in high school, even those who had full-time aides, and others with undiagnosed learning disabilities. Faculty members who are teaching Suburban 101 need to know this and know how to direct students to the resources available to them.

It was mentioned on more than one occasion during the interviews that the students felt heard during their Suburban 101 class, and that having the opportunity to share some of the challenges they were experiencing with their professor and their classmates was helpful. Based on the challenges, students were able to hear suggestions from their professor, but also from their classmates on how to manage or overcome those challenges. Students seemed grateful for the opportunity to just express themselves, to share their experiences, and to learn about the experiences of other students. For future practice, it would be worth considering to allowing a time for this is all course sections. Another consideration for practice would be to standardize the use of group work during class time to familiarize students with the other students in the course, allowing students to build meaningful relationships. Furthermore, standardizing other course content such as how to use the learning and scheduling platform is also worth considering.

From my own experiences in the field, and from working with students who are struggling in my everyday job duties, I have seen how connecting with an individual on campus and having accountability to someone who has shown genuine interest can be impactful in helping students set and achieve goals. During the long process of writing my dissertation, I have had the opportunity to reflect further on those observations, and to understand personally how those factors can contribute to a student's ability to perform. For students, getting the feeling of support from a faculty member in a course such as Suburban 101 can be impactful, especially for a first-year student (Guzzardo, et. al., 2021).

I would like to be able to see the impact of embedding a success coach or some kind of peer mentor into the classroom setting or requiring students to utilize some of the campus resources that are available. If an additional meeting time or requirement was added to the course, it would also allow the course to be offered for three credits, rather than the two it is offered as currently. While students did not share much feedback on course improvement, the two things that were mentioned included having the class at a bad time, ie early in the morning, and also the number of credits of the course. The course is being offered as a two-credit course. There were two students who said they wished the course was worth three credits, but I would not recommend a change in the number of credits unless there was additional material added to the course. I do think having additional class time when students would be required to use on-campus services such as tutoring, academic coaching, study hall, or some type of peer mentoring would be something to consider adding, if making it an additional credit. This would further normalize the use of services, and to provide more support for students who need it.

Research

Generally, data from this study provided an understanding of minoritized students' experience in a college success course, specifically at Suburban University. If time permitted, it would have been interesting to look beyond the first semester to second semester retention and see what the four- and six-year graduation rates for these students would be. It would also would have been interesting to see what the student's overall GPA was at the end of their first term because while it is important that students return for their second semester, I would be hopeful that their GPAs at the end of the first term gave them some confidence moving into their future semester.

Since the importance of faculty emerged as a theme through the interviews, it would be great to research what specific characteristics of the faculty students enjoyed, and dive deeper into what made the faculty for this course particularly impactful from the student perspective. It would be worth comparing the differences in faculty across curriculum to faculty within a college success course to find similarities and differences. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to not only look at faculty characteristics, but also their teaching styles. We know the transition to college for first-year students is challenging no matter what their demographics are, however, students from minoritized populations face additional challenges as they navigate a new environment, it would be beneficial to explore whether faculty knowledge in these areas would change a student's experience within the course.

The theme of self-motivation emerged as a reason why study participants continued to enroll in the University. Further research exploring student's perspective on what factors contribute to their self-motivation and how the University might enhance or

build upon their motivation during their first semester of enrollment would be worthwhile for retention efforts. Using the lens of the Self-Determination Theory, which incorporates motivation, personality, and well-being would provide new insight into how a University might help develop this characteristic within students (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Similarly, Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory, which examines one's ability to define their own beliefs, identity, and social relationships would be worth exploring as it relates to student persistence and college success courses.

Leadership

What was reinforced during this study was the importance of care and empathy in a leadership position. I believe that Suburban 101 students, as well as people we encounter everyday are looking for people to care about them and to show interest and belief in them. They want to be accepted for who they are, not judged. For this reason, my belief in the importance of a relational approach to leadership has been enhanced through the study (Northouse, 2021). A relational approach situates leadership as a relationship, therefore stressing the collaboration needed to be successful (Northouse, 2021). The students included in this study showed that a teacher, administrator, or any educator, requires the mutual participation, and mutual commitment for both parties to maximize the benefits. As a leader, it is important to build positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect. To build this type of environment, a leader must be welcoming and kind to people when they are first introduced. The very first interaction with someone can set the tone for the rest of one's relationship with them. Similar to any customer service role, first impressions do matter. To maintain a mutual commitment from everyone, respect and appreciation needs to be offered continually from the leader. This

does include constructive feedback, but such feedback will be best received if the person receiving the feedback knows it is coming from a place of care.

To build positive relationships in a leadership role, as needed for a relational approach, a leader must be authentic. As an authentic leader, I know it is important to lead with my heart, and to make sure I am being true to my values (George, 2015). Being true to myself is the only way I can build trust with my colleagues and with students (George, 2015). In my role at the University, I will continue to lead with a student-first approach, knowing that the reason we all work at a university is to support the students attending.

Similarly, people want to be seen for who they are without fear of judgement. Students need to be seen for their strengths, and not to feel bad if they do not understand something, or do not know how to navigate something. As the first-year students trying to find their way at a new institution, often being away from their families for the first time, they need to know that other students are feeling the same way, and they are not alone. I would like to continue to find ways to provide students and staff with a place they know they can be themselves, their authentic

Conclusion

When considering the intent of college success courses of aiding student in the transition from high school to college, there is no doubt based on the interviews that Suburban 101 absolutely made the transition easier for students. Hatch et al. (2018) suggests the importance of a college success course in orienting students to the college campus and policies. This was described throughout the interviews as something students felt Suburban 101 did for them. Furthermore, students mentioned learning about policies

and terminology that they would not have known if they had not been enrolled in the college success course. Understanding basic words being used all the time may seem simple, but if not enrolled in a College Success Course, the information may not get to students at all, or it may happen much later in their enrollment.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Date:

Interviewee:

Time of Interview:

Interview Questions

Questions:

1. What made you choose [Suburban]?

2. Can you tell me a little bit about what motivates you to continue?
3. Tell me about your experience in your College Success Course (Suburban 101)? What really stood out for you?

4. Following CSC, have you used any of the resources you learned about?

5. Can you give me an example of something you learned in Suburban 101 that might have contributed to you staying at Suburban?

6. Can you tell me about what worked well with CSC and what could be changed or improved? Do you have any specific examples you'd be willing to share?

7. If you have questions about your grades, what's expected of you regarding school, or anything else related to your college experience, who are you most likely to ask?

8. Would you recommend the college success course (suburban 101) to new, incoming students, why or why not?

Photo Elicitation:
I'm going to show you eight photos. Please select the two that best represent your experience in Suburban 101 and your transition to Suburban University.

9. Why did you choose the first photograph, what spoke to you?

10. What made you select the second photograph?

11. What feelings are brought about as you reflect on your experience in CSC?

12. What or who do you attribute your ability to persist in college?

13. What characteristics do you possess that you think have helped you persist?

14. Can you describe any times you faced challenges while in college?

15. How were you able to handle or navigate those challenges?

16. What changes would you make to your experience at Suburban 101?

17. What else would you want to share about your experience at Suburban University?

Appendix B

Photo Elicitation Photos


TIME FOR CHANGE
SILENCE IS VIOLENCE


DORM Room


believe in yourself