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First-Generation College Students: A Qualitative Exploration of the Relationship Between
Parental Education Level and Perceptions of Faculty-Student Interaction

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVEL AND PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION

By Micol Hutchison, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

Major Director: Maike Philipsen, Ph.D., Professor, School of Education

While quantitative research has determined that first-generation college students (FGS) are less likely to interact with faculty than are their non-FGS peers, this qualitative study examines how incoming first-year college students, both FGS and non-FGS, perceive faculty-student interaction and whether they consider it important. Addressing different types of interaction with college instructors, both in-class and out-of-class, participants across a range of FGS status shared their views through surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups. Focusing specifically on incoming first year students, this study also explores the motives for, impediments to, and encouragements to faculty-student interaction that students identify. Finally, the study examines the origins of students' perceptions of such interactions. It finds that FGS and non-FGS come to college with different cultural and social capital pertaining to this, and that non-FGS have a greater familiarity with the field and expected habitus of college. However, FGS

demonstrate an ability to access their social capital in order to obtain valuable knowledge that informs their perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction. Further, in the focus groups, FGS described emerging comfort with faculty over the course of their first months of college. The origins of students' perceptions often differed, as non-FGS were more likely to describe being influenced by family, while FGS more often explained how they accessed their social capital in order to obtain cultural capital and practical knowledge regarding college and faculty-student interaction. Meanwhile, FGS' and non-FGS' motives for interacting with faculty, and the impediments and encouragements they identified, were frequently similar. The motives included their desire to learn and share opinions, as well as their interest in obtaining letters of recommendation in the future, while comfort with classmates and faculty and interest in class were commonly named as encouragements to interact with faculty.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

First-generation college students, defined as children whose parents do not have college degrees, are less likely to go to college than are the offspring of college graduates. First-generation college students who do enroll in post-secondary education are less likely to complete a two-year or four-year degree. Though research has shed light on some of the reasons for these phenomena, there is still an incomplete understanding of why they occur. While researchers have examined the differences between first-generation college students (FGS) and non-FGS since the middle of the twentieth century, and the term “first-generation college student” has been used consistently since the 1980s, researchers have struggled to identify how FGS differ from their peers, and how to help them succeed in college.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that first-generation college students are socially, intellectually and academically less engaged in college (see, for example, Arum & Roksa, 2011; Davis, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). One area of intellectual and academic engagement in which first-generation college students differ from their non-first-generation peers is faculty-student interaction. Compared to their non-FGS peers, FGS communicate with their instructors less, are less likely to discuss class-related or other matters with faculty, and less frequently talk or ask questions in class (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kim & Sax, 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). This may affect FGS’

success in college: Research has shown that higher levels of interaction with faculty strongly correlate with improved student outcomes (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Lamport, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001).

My study explored whether and why first-generation students are less likely to interact with faculty than are their non-first-generation peers, both in class and out of class. Specifically, it examines how first-generation college status impacted students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction. The focus on incoming first-year students highlighted FGS' early expectations, which can help faculty and institutions address the lack of interaction. Based on questionnaires, individual interviews and focus groups, the study shed light on FGS' initial attitudes towards formal and informal faculty-student interaction. Though the primary area of interest in this study was FGS and their attitudes towards faculty-student interaction, in order to better contextualize the findings, the study also considered non-FGS. The findings contribute to the collective understanding of how first-generation college students view interaction with faculty, and why these students might not be as engaged in this aspect of the college experience as are their peers.

Overview of the Study

Research to date has provided a good understanding of first-generation college students' demographic characteristics and their challenges, regarding their paths to college and experiences once there. Early significant studies of FGS looked at the influence of family on FGS' attainment goals, finding that parents' education level was significant (see, for example, Blau & Duncan, 1967; Davies & Kandel, 1981), but these findings were not consistent (McDill & Coleman, 1965). Some of the early research uncovered FGS' feelings of alienation and discomfort as they took a path markedly different from their families' and friends' (London,

1989). These studies tended to approach FGS through a sociological or psychological lens, focusing on aspirations and relationships.

In the 1980s, research on FGS began to expand. While many studies still explored the correlation between parents' educational level and their children's educational goals, the research also looked at FGS' academic and social struggles in college and FGS' attrition rates (see, for example, Tinto, 1993; Billson & Terry, 1982; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989).

Over the past couple of decades, most of the research on FGS has explored three areas: preparing them for college while still in high school; persistence, focusing more on the student perspective; and retention, which examines the institutions. Studies of persistence and retention have sought to understand the challenges that students face once they arrive in college, alongside the roadblocks and pitfalls of the high school-to-college transition—socially, academically and culturally.

Some recent studies have examined students' learning and cognitive development at the beginning of and through college (see, for example, Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Arum & Roksa, 2011), and a handful of studies since the 1970s have taken a quantitative approach to understanding FGS' motivation for going to college. In addition to this research, comprehensive data have been collected that provides demographic information for FGS and non-FGS in college. This includes the National Center for Educational Statistics' (NCES) National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), and the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL).

A great deal of research has also been done in the area of faculty-student interaction. This research provides evidence that interaction between instructors and students on campus

correlates strongly with beneficial intellectual and academic outcomes for students. Subsequent studies examined the varied effects of faculty-student interaction on students of different backgrounds, including FGS (Kim & Sax, 2009; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004).

The previous studies on FGS help us understand the demographic characteristics of FGS and their paths to college. They also shed light on the challenges that FGS face, their goals in and especially after college, and their relative lack of success, in comparison to their peers. Research on faculty-student interaction has demonstrated its benefits to all students, including first-generation college students (Tinto, 1993; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996).

First-generation college students' experience growing up is influenced by far more than just their parents' education levels. Collectively, some or all these influences cause FGS to interact less with faculty. Looking at this dispositional or behavioral difference through a Bourdieuan lens, a likely explanation for the lack of interaction lies in students' comfort with the college environment—not just with the academic elements of it, but with the social and cultural aspects, as well. The “set of dispositions” that FGS bring to college may be “second nature” (Thompson, 2003, p.12) but may not serve them well. Understanding how FGS adapt—or have difficulty adapting—to the new environment of college can contribute significantly to their success. Specifically, learning about why first-generation college students interact as they do with faculty can lead to a change in the approaches that faculty and institutions employ in working with FGS, ways to equip FGS with information about expected interactions, or ideas for helping FGS increase their comfort level with faculty.

While some comprehensive studies have interviewed FGS about engagement with faculty and, more broadly, about their experiences in college, those interviews have generally taken place later in or at the conclusion of the college career. Because many FGS stumble in their first semester or first year of college, understanding how they perceive faculty-student interaction, and how those perceptions are formed, can help universities shape their services and support for FGS.

This interpretive qualitative study helped further that understanding. By including participants with a broad range of parental education levels, my study explored the interplay between first-generation status and students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction. Through examination not just of how the students' perceptions differ, but also of the origin for these perceptions, a deeper understanding of FGS' statistically lower levels of engagement with faculty emerged from the study.

Rationale

Colleges and universities have difficulty retaining first-generation college students. Even when controlling for other factors, such as academic preparation or family income, FGS are less successful in college, measured by GPA and graduation rate (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1996; Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; and Pascarella et al., 2004). Faculty-student interaction is a strong predictor of academic and intellectual gains (Lampton, 1993; Lundberg & Schreier, 2004; Pascarella et al., 1978). A better understanding of why FGS interact less—and perhaps differently—with their instructors in college can help both faculty and schools facilitate better student engagement for FGS. This increased engagement would likely benefit FGS, improve their academic and intellectual gains and increase their satisfaction with college.

Also of importance, as race is eliminated in affirmative action, “first-generation college” may replace race as a category that allows us to provide opportunity for students who have not had equal access to education. At the secondary school level and in public discourse, there is a great deal of discussion about getting first-generation students to college. In higher education, there is concern with retaining them through graduation. In order to assist this effort, it is important to understand why FGS are not staying; their relative lack of engagement, possibly predicated on a lack of comfort or confidence, deserves exploration.

The study of first-generation students is centrally important to a democratic society. As Saenz et al. (2007) suggest, “To some extent, interest in first-generation students grows out of a larger belief in the promises of our nation as a land of opportunity” (p. iv). If college is necessary for upward mobility, and if society strives to be one in which upward mobility is achievable, it is necessary to help students get to and succeed in college.

In previous studies of FGS, researchers have recommended that universities play a more active and direct role in helping FGS adjust to college, academically and socially. For example, Davis (2010) suggests that it is the universities’ obligation to inform FGS of what to expect from university life and how to be academically successful. In order for this recommendation to be effective, institutions need to know the anticipations and dispositions students bring to college, and what kinds of challenges they expect. This includes expectations and dispositions about engaging with faculty in class and outside of class.

Evidence indicates that FGS are often focused more on the goal of obtaining a degree than they are on the academic or social elements of college. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) have found that FGS are often more concerned with receiving a diploma and getting a job than they are with social growth or personal discoveries. Meanwhile, Tinto

(1993) suggests that college is not only about academics, but also about personal growth and new social and intellectual experiences. In response to FGS' tendency to focus on a diploma, rather than on personal and intellectual growth, Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) write that "professionals working with first-generation students should not focus only on revealing the extrinsic rewards (e.g., financial) of academic achievement but also on the intrinsic rewards (e.g., enjoying learning for the sake of learning) that can lead students to increase their study skills and decrease their absenteeism" (p. 973). Given FGS' lower levels of engagement, and considering the correlation between engagement and academic success, institutions of higher learning need to have a more complete understanding of FGS' attitudes and approach towards in-class and out-of-class engagement; a focus on faculty-student interaction contributes to the general research on the topic.

A Brief Review of the Literature

A lot is known about the demographic characteristics of FGS. Compared to their non-FGS peers, FGS are lower-income (Ishitani, 2006; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Terenzini et al., 1996), more often minorities (Bui, 2005; Choy, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1996), older (Benson, Hewitt, Haegney, Devos & Crosling, 2010; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996), more likely to have dependents (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), and more likely to live at or near home (Saenz et al., 2007). While in college, they are more likely to work, both on and off campus, and to work more hours than non-FGS (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2008; Saenz et al., 2007). Compared to non-FGS, they also have more financial stressors (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke 2011; Tinto, 1993). They tend to come from more tightly knit families or communities (Orbe, 2004). Academically, they are not as prepared for

college as their non-FGS peers (Choy, 2011; Davis, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996), less likely to have decided on a major (Davis, 2010), and more inclined to choose a major that they or their families see as “practical” (Snell, 2008).

Challenges

Looking at different aspects of the college experience, an overwhelming body of research indicates that first-generation college students face more challenges in college than do their peers who are not FGS. Even when controlling for other factors (educational expectations, income, academic preparation, influence of parents and peers), first-generation college status is still a significant predictor of difficulties in college (Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; D’Allegro & Kerns, 2010). FGS’ challenges are academic, social, cultural, and financial.

Because of less rigorous pre-college preparation and less guidance for college, FGS arrive in college academically less prepared than their peers for college-level work (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Davis, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1996; and Pascarella et al., 2004). In addition to this, their critical thinking scores and self-efficacy—that is, their confidence in their own abilities in this new environment—are lower (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Davis, 2010). FGS’ academic disadvantages are compounded by their comparative unfamiliarity with the educational system (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), lack of “active coping strategies” (Mehta et al., 2011) and reluctance to ask for help (Davis, 2010). All of these additional challenges for FGS may reflect a mismatch between the expectations of college and the preparation or expectations of FGS.

FGS often find themselves more socially disconnected from campus life. In addition to being more likely to live off campus, they also work more hours, and often feel isolated and marginalized (Jehangir, 2010; Bergerson, 2007). This is especially true for minorities on predominantly white campuses (Orbe, 2004). This social isolation is also connected to FGS’ less

frequent participation in extracurricular activities and volunteer work (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008). This in turn may lead to lower self-perceptions of both their social confidence and leadership abilities (Saenz et al., 2007).

Studies have found that family support is one of the most important factors in a first-generation student's success in college. Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005), Bergerson (2007), and Coffman (2011) describe a strong relationship between parental involvement and success. According to McCarron and Inkelas (2006), family support and involvement are the best predictors of FGS' college aspirations.

Another aspect of the college experience that creates difficulties for FGS involves interaction with faculty, both in and out of class (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). FGS interact less with their instructors and are less engaged in class, in terms of both participation and asking questions (Terenzini et al., 1996; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Arum & Roksa, 2011). These quantitative studies have clearly established that FGS interact less with faculty. For FGS to be successful, researchers have urged colleges and universities to encourage student engagement, and the research is clear about the value of this for FGS (see, for example, Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 1993; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Davis, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Reasons for Going to College

Studies indicate that FGS have slightly different motives for attending college than do their non-FGS peers. FGS tend to be more motivated by family and money (Bergerson, 2007; Bui, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007). For example, they are more likely than non-FGS to say that making money is a very important reason for going to college (Saenz et al., 2007). Many studies have also suggested that FGS want to do better than their parents (Coffman, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Davis (2010) finds that, though these reasons predominate, FGS also cite “learning” (p. 119) or “evolving” as a person (p. 127) as reasons for attending college. Similarly, as reported by Stephens et al. (2012), 42% of FGS say that “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” is a very important reason for college; 78% of FGS cite the desire to “expand my knowledge of the world” as a reason, and 62% select “become an independent thinker.” Still, in all cases the percentage of FGS who give each of these answers is significantly lower than the percentage of non-FGS.

Faculty-Student Interaction

There is a strong positive correlation between faculty-student interaction and academic achievement, intellectual gains, satisfaction with college and retention (Lamport, 1993; Astin, 1984). These interactions include communication between students and instructors, as well as in-class engagement. Kim and Sax (2009), Anaya and Cole (2001), Kuh and Hu (2001), and Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) describe the differences in these outcomes for different students, based on race and socioeconomic factors.

Although causality has not been determined (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lamport, 1993), evidence strongly indicates that, among different kinds of faculty-student interaction, interactions about course material benefits students the most, as manifested in improved GPA, intellectual gains, degree goals, academic motivation, and satisfaction with the college experience (Kim & Sax, 2009; Hearn, 1987). Some studies have found numerous positive outcomes associated with faculty-student interaction, but have not found a link to a higher GPA for first-generation college students (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella, Terenzini & Hibel, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977).

Research indicates that first-generation college students are less likely than their peers to interact with faculty, whether informally or formally (Terenzini et al., 1996; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Arum & Roksa, 2011). For FGS who do report interaction with faculty, however, there is a correlation with improved outcomes to the same degree as for other students (Kim & Sax, 2009; Endo & Harpel (1982). Through interviews, Wang (2013) finds that FGS derive and recognize significant benefit from their interactions with faculty. Chang (2005) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) connect increased levels of faculty-student interaction with a student's likelihood to persevere to a degree.

The Bourdieuan concepts of field, habitus, cultural capital, and social capital are helpful in analyzing and understanding students' experiences in college, including their interactions with faculty. For incoming college students, the university environment represents a new *field*—an environment where certain rules are understood, and specific kinds of capital and habitus are expected. Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to describe an individual's self-perception and disposition. A student interacting with faculty illustrates an application of a student's habitus in a specific field (or social context), in this case the academic environment. *Cultural capital* (necessary knowledge and skills) and *social capital* (one's ability to access a social network) facilitate these interactions. Dumais (2002) investigates the ways in which students are expected, beginning in elementary school, to possess certain capital and habitus, and how they struggle to succeed without it. This supports Bourdieu's (1973) assertion that the culture of the dominant class—which overlaps with the educated class—is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system. Student engagement, including faculty-student interaction, is one aspect of an expectation in the college environment.

Padgett, Johnson and Pascarella (2004) write that “first-generation students are at a disadvantage compared to their non-first-generation peers given the deficit in cultural and social capital transmitted through generations” (p. 261). While this phrasing suggests that FGS arrive in college lacking capital, rather than possessing different capital that is less applicable to the new field, research to date does support the assertion that FGS have worse outcomes in college. My study focuses on a specific area where FGS appear to be less engaged than their non-FGS peers: faculty-student interaction. This reduced interaction is correlated with, and may be a cause of, FGS’ poorer academic outcomes, as measured by GPA and graduation rates. However, it is of value to frame the phenomenon not as a deficit, but rather as a difference. FGS’ cultural and social capital may be in no way deficient when compared to non-FGS but may nevertheless differ from established or assumed “norms” and reduce or change interaction with faculty. Importantly, because the educational system, from the elementary level—as described by Dumais (2002)—through the college level, assumes and rewards students’ mastery of the cultural and social capital of the educated classes, FGS’ unfamiliarity with these types of capital could put them at an unquestionable disadvantage in the new field of college.

Methodology

My study examined the perceptions of faculty-student interaction of both FGS and non-FGS, considering the influence of students’ first-generation status on these perceptions. It also explored the encouragements and impediments to these interactions that students identified.

Through demographic data and written responses on a questionnaire, along with interviews and focus groups, I studied incoming first-year students’ perceptions of faculty-student interaction, and examined the origins of those perceptions, for both FGS and non-FGS.

The study was undertaken in three phases. The first phase, comprising the completion of questionnaires, had 36 participants. The second phase, which was composed of individual interviews, had 16 participants, selected from the initial group of 36 participants. The third phase, the focus groups, had eight participants, self-selected from the 16 participants in the second phase. In all cases, the participants were students in their first semester of college, the summer term and second semester, the fall term.

All students who completed the first phase of the study were asked to indicate whether they were interested in being invited to individual interviews. I contacted 20 students who indicated interest, 16 of whom scheduled interviews with me for the second phase of the study. The sample in the second phase reflected variability in parental education level, as well as variability of other demographic characteristics. Following the second phase, all participants in this individual interview phase were invited to take part in the third phase, the focus groups. Eight of the 16 students from the individual interviews attended the focus groups. All student participants were enrolled in the same summer program, so were taking the same classes and were acquainted with one another.

During the first week of the summer program, I invited students to participate in the first phase of the study. At this time, all students who volunteered to participate completed a written questionnaire (Appendix A) addressing their understanding of what is necessary for a student to be successful in college, and their perceptions of the challenges they expected to face and the ways in which they anticipated being successful. The questionnaire also included demographic information. The three questions on the questionnaire were open-ended for two reasons: First, this allowed me to see whether student participants brought up any aspects of faculty-student interaction on their own when thinking about these broad topics; and second, the questionnaire

was used as a starting point in the second phase of the study, the individual interviews. In these interviews, I asked students to elaborate on answers from the questionnaires that indirectly related to faculty-student interaction and sought clarity about their responses if necessary. The questionnaire also included a demographic portion, on which students indicated their parents' level of education. In this part, they were asked to provide information about their race, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and language(s) spoken at home. This demographic information was used in data analysis, and also to confirm that participants in the second and third phases of the study were diverse in the demographic categories.

Based on the questionnaire, I invited 20 students, who reflected significant variability in parental education level, to the second phase of the study. Though variability in first-generation status was of primary importance, secondarily, I focused on ensuring that participants reflected a diversity of SES, race, gender, and language background. (All students in this summer program had been accepted by the university without language contingencies, which meant that, according to the university, none of them needed remedial English language instruction.) The specific selection criteria—both intended and enacted—are further described in the Methodology chapter.

In the second, third, and fourth weeks of the program, I interviewed each of the 16 students individually for 25-50 minutes. The interviews allowed students to expand on their questionnaire responses and guided them to speak further about possible challenges they anticipated facing in college, how they planned to deal with those challenges, and the strengths they perceived they brought to being a college student. Additionally, I asked students to describe the characteristics or background influences that had fostered or inhibited their perceived abilities to succeed in college. I asked them to describe more specifically their interactions with

faculty in and out of class during their first semester of college, as well as the factors that fostered or inhibited these interactions. Also, students were asked to describe the ways in which they thought their upbringing or family might have influenced how or how much they interacted with faculty, in and out of class. Finally, I gave students the opportunity to talk about whether they felt sufficiently prepared for college, and if not, in what way(s) they feel ill-prepared.

The responses from the questionnaires of all student participants in the first phase of the study, along with the interviews from all students in the second phase, were transcribed and uploaded to ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program. Initial coding categories were created based on the questionnaire responses from all participants in the first phase of the study, on the interview transcripts in the second phase, and on the Bourdieuan framework. These coding categories were revisited throughout analysis, and revised, expanded, or combined as appropriate.

Following the data collection and preliminary analysis, I conducted a focus group, to which all participants in the second phase of the study were invited. I asked specific questions about information gaps that had appeared in my data analysis, shared with them the research findings and invited them to respond to these findings and to make recommendations. The focus groups provided an opportunity for member checking as well as for participant involvement and personal empowerment for the students.

Attention to rigor is crucial in good qualitative research. Trustworthiness was enhanced through credibility, transferability, and consistency. In order to facilitate this, the study included triangulation, member checks, rich description, observer's comments and memos, and peer examination. All of these elements are described in further detail in the Methodology chapter.

As one further central step in augmenting trustworthiness, I kept a journal throughout the research process, in which I recorded not only the evolution of the study, but also my reactions, expectations and preconceptions. Through this journal, I attempted to be reflective and thus to focus on reflexivity in and through all aspects of the study.

Research Questions

1. How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?
 - a. How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college student success?
 - b. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?
 - c. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?
 - d. How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?
 - e. Do FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction change during their first semester, and if so, how?
2. What is the origin of FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?
 - a. What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?
 - b. How does FGS status relate to the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?

Definition of Terms

One of the most challenging aspects of analyzing the research about first-generation college students is that the definition of the term “first-generation college” is not standard. Because of this inconsistency, there is an incomplete understanding of who FGS are and why they are not as successful in college as their peers. Sometimes the category “first-generation college student” includes only students whose parents have not attended college, since one of the main difficulties that FGS face is unfamiliarity with college culture and lack of knowledge about how to navigate the world of higher education. Other times, it refers to students for whom neither parent holds a bachelor’s degree, which Davis (2010) justifies by explaining that it is not only a simpler category, but also reflects how employers look at it. Using the definition this way, the disadvantage conferred on students by FGS status might be more economic than social. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) employs two categories of FGS: students whose parents did not attend college and students whose parents did not complete a four-year degree.

For the purpose of this study, I defined a first-generation college student as one for whom neither parent has a four-year college degree. However, because I collected demographic information from each participant that more specifically indicated the level of education of each parent, my data was richer. This allowed for more nuanced educational categories, which helped bring trends and differences to the surface. This addition was motivated by Lee, Sax, Kim and Hagedorn’s (2004) finding that there is a significant difference between students whose parents have no college education and students whose parents have some college education; my own research benefitted from a differentiated understanding of FGS’s parental education.

Summary

Previous research on FGS has produced extensive information about their demographic characteristics, their preparation for college, and the challenges—academic, social, cultural and financial—they face once in college. Overall, compared to non-FGS, FGS struggle more in college in all regards, and are less likely to graduate.

To complement the current research on FGS, this study examined one aspect of student engagement: faculty-student interaction. In order to provide context and comparison, this qualitative study collected data from students across a broad range of first-generation status. In contrast to much of the previous relevant qualitative research, which has focused on students who are completing or have dropped out of college, this study interviewed and gathered written data from participants early in their college careers.

This study explored *why* FGS differ in engagement, specifically in regard to interaction with faculty in and out of class. It examined how both FGS and non-FGS perceived the importance of faculty-student interaction in ensuring student success, and what factors made students more or less likely to interact. It found that, though some differences emerged, when it came to faculty-student interaction, FGS and non-FGS identified similar motives, encouragements, and impediments. Finally, by examining the origins of students' perceptions, the study considered whether FGS' interaction—or lack thereof—with faculty reflected a lack of the kind of social and cultural capital that benefits college students. While my research suggested a clear difference in the kinds of capital that FGS and non-FGS brought to college, it found that FGS often turned to their social capital in order to obtain cultural capital related to college, while

non-FGS more frequently acquired cultural capital about college from their parents and from the experiences that their parents exposed them to.

Understanding FGS' reduced interaction with faculty can improve the ability of institutions of higher education to assist these students in having successful college experiences. Because faculty-student interaction has been tied to numerous valuable student outcomes, this study contributes to knowledge that will inform universities in their efforts to create support for FGS at the onset of their college careers.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Method of the Review

Research for this literature review began with a general search in the VCU Libraries search for “First-Generation College Students,” in peer-reviewed journals. This yielded over 100,000 results. Narrowing this down by adding the phrases “higher education” and “university” or “college” brought the total number of academic articles down to a more manageable 221. After reading through the abstracts of these articles, I was able to narrow the search to 46 potentially relevant articles, which I read. Of these, approximately 30 were suitable, based both on my thematic focus and on an assessment of the scholarly quality of the article.

In addition to focusing on the studies and results described in these articles, I carefully examined the literature review sections and the bibliographies. In this way, I was able to find foundational articles that were not located in my original search, including books. Through this, I found an additional eight books and 24 articles. Finally, I went to the ERIC database and repeated my original search with the same search terms, making sure that there were no major articles that I had missed. In this process, I located an additional nine potentially useful articles.

The next part of my literature search focused on faculty-student interaction. I first went back to the articles and books I had already read and looked for information about faculty-student interaction, noting and then seeking out the source references in those texts.

Subsequently, I searched for peer-reviewed articles in the VCU Libraries search using the terms “college student faculty interaction,” which yielded 422 results. I scanned through the titles and abstracts of all of these articles and carefully read the literature review section of each, keeping track of frequently-cited studies and articles. I then located and read these articles. Later, I determined that I did not have enough recent studies about the potential benefits for students, so I did the search again, this time limiting it to articles published after the year 2000, and adding the word “outcome” to the search terms. This brought up 175 articles, the abstracts of which I read, selecting the most relevant articles.

The final part of my literature review centered on the theoretical framework of my study. For this, I returned to the articles I had already read about first-generation college students and faculty-student interaction and selected the articles that used a Bourdieuan framework. These articles’ literature reviews and bibliographies led me to Pierre Bourdieu’s central writings, along with numerous secondary sources about the French philosopher.

Theoretical Framework

Research on first-generation students’ challenges in college often uses the framework of Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction and cultural capital. Because Bourdieu did not specifically define “cultural capital,” the term has been operationalized in different ways. For example, Collin (2011) defines it as “symbolic goods, skills, and titles” (p. 787), while Dumais (2002) describes it as “linguistic and cultural competence” along with “broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of the upper classes” (p. 44). Collier and Morgan (2008) describe it as “preexisting knowledge about interacting successfully in academic settings, including such essentially social skills as ability to recognize and respond to the standards faculty

members use when they evaluate assignments” (p. 429). A student possessing the cultural capital that is expected by the educational institutions, according to this definition is able to identify and successfully fulfill the role of college student.

Although the concept of cultural capital is most often associated with social class, class is correlated with education level, and FGS are more likely to come from a lower social class. Additionally, since aspects of cultural capital are both conveyed and encouraged in formal education, students coming from less educated backgrounds are more likely to lack this kind of capital. Finally, as Thompson (2003) describes in the introduction to Bourdieu’s *Language & Symbolic Power*, the aforementioned knowledge and skills that make up the cultural capital promoted within the educational system are “exemplified by educational or technical qualifications” (p. 14).

Bourdieu (1973) asserts that the educational system transmits and rewards the culture of the dominant class. Dumais (2002) describes how “the acquisition of cultural capital and subsequent access to academic rewards depend upon the cultural capital passed down by family, which in turn is largely dependent on social class” (p. 44). Both of these concepts support the assertion that cultural capital correlates with family educational level as it correlates with social class.

Starting in elementary school, students are expected to recognize, receive and internalize the values of the dominant culture, but the schools do not explicitly teach these skills (Dumais, 2002), which puts students who are not part of the dominant (educated, upper- or middle-class) culture at a disadvantage. This disadvantage reverberates through a student’s elementary and secondary schooling and into and beyond college.

Though Tinto (1993) does not directly reference cultural capital, he presents the concept of “academic integration,” positing that students begin college with certain individual attributes, school experiences and family dynamics that directly affect their perseverance to degree. Typically, successful academic integration has been measured by grade point average (GPA), which may be incomplete or oversimplified (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Whether one uses GPA or a more comprehensive measure of academic integration, the individual attributes suggested by Tinto, which include academic and social self-confidence and perseverance, can be tied back to the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital may influence whether a student sees benefit in participating in extra-curricular activities or accessing a college’s tutoring or writing center, for example. Similarly, capital is likely to affect how or whether one interacts with faculty and other students; all of these elements can benefit a college student’s academic trajectory.

Other aspects of cultural capital that are relevant to college students’ success include an awareness of the broad benefits of higher education, beyond the most practical concept that a college degree leads to better job opportunities. While a student whose parent had the full residential college experience may arrive on campus consciously or unconsciously anticipating experiences and opportunities that foster growth and maturation, students whose parents did not go to college may only view college as a set of classes required for a degree. Pascarella et al. (2004) emphasize the disadvantage that FGS can experience in higher education: “Individuals with highly educated parents may have a distinct advantage over first-generation students in understanding the culture of education and its role in personal development” (p. 252).

Different environments require different forms of cultural capital. Bourdieu refers to these environments as *fields*, which Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2008) define as “a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, appointments and titles which constitute an

objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities” (p. 21). Higher education is its own field, and, as Dumais (2002) describes within primary schooling, those within this field—faculty, staff and students—are expected to possess a certain type of cultural capital. Thus, while each student comes to college possessing cultural capital that was necessary in the cultural fields he/she was previously familiar with, that capital may not transfer. “Generally, the value or otherwise of specific forms of capital is determined within, and often confined to, a particular field—although overlapping does occur” (Webb et al., 2008, p. 23). Students whose background is notably different from that of the faculty—such as students whose parents do not have experience with higher education—may possess capital that overlaps minimally with the capital that fosters success in college.

An aspect of cultural capital that is highly applicable to first-generation students and their engagement with faculty is the concept of *habitus*, which Dumais (2002) describes as “one’s disposition, which influences the actions that one takes” (p. 46). Similarly, Webb et al. (2008) explain that habitus embodies how “we are disposed towards certain attitudes, values or ways of behaving because of the influence exerted by our cultural trajectories” (p. 38).

Knowing when and how to act in specific situations is a central aspect of habitus. Collin (2011) delves into this more specifically: “Actors...may draw upon their habitus to help them: recognize and build specific kinds of situations;...occupy positions within social spaces; and deploy capital in appropriate ways” (p. 787). In-class and out-of-class interactions with faculty can be more difficult if a student lacks this habitus, is not familiar with the situation, is uncomfortable with the social space, and/or does not possess the necessary capital.

Bourdieu (1973) asserts that habitus leads to the reproduction of the dominant social structure. It is “generated by one’s place in the social structure; by internalizing the social

structure and one's place in it, one comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible for one's life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly" (Dumais, 2002, p. 46).

Interacting with faculty is one of the practices expected of college students. Students with certain kinds of cultural capital may inherently know how to play this role, or may feel comfortable mimicking or learning the role; students without it—including FGS—may not. This lack of ease may start long before college. Describing school-age students, Dumais (2002) suggests that "[l]ower-class students...find the school environment different from their home environment and lack the capital necessary to fit in as well as higher-SES students" (p. 46).

The elements of one's habitus are transmitted at home and through one's upbringing, but habitus is not immutable. As Webb et al. (2008) describe, "[H]abitus is both durable, and oriented towards the practical: dispositions, knowledges and values are always potentially subject to modification, rather than being passively consumed or reinscribed" (p. 41). They further explain that habitus can be malleable "when the narratives, values and explanations of a habitus no longer make sense...[or]...when agents use their understanding and feel for the rules of the game as a means of furthering and improving their own standing and capital within a cultural field" (p. 41).

Habitus refers to one's self-perception and disposition, which contribute to one's comfort in an environment; it is a central part of Bourdieu's (1973) ideas about cultural capital. In conjunction with habitus and cultural capital is social capital, which is the social network that one has access to, and through which information and opportunities are transmitted. While almost any individual within any class or culture has some kind of social capital, the social capital of the educated or upper classes is most useful in the educational system. As Soria and Stebleton (2012) describe, "[T]here are factors that often compromise first-generation students'

academic engagement on campus. These factors can be attributed to first-generation students' lack of social capital" (p. 675). Like cultural capital, social capital is more often used in discussions of social class, but it also applies directly to educational level, as those with college-educated families are more likely to be aware of the networks and connections that benefit students in college.

Beyond accessing the short- and long-term advantages for one's college and career opportunities, students with the "right" capital are at a definite advantage in their ability to interact in expected and beneficial ways in college, and specifically with faculty. Those whose habitus was inculcated in an advantageous environment are "*already predisposed* to act in certain ways [and] pursue certain goals" (Thompson, 2003, p. 17) that fit in well with the college environment. They possess a suitable competence, which is "acquired in a social context and through practice" (Thompson, 2003, p. 82) and appropriate confidence, which is demonstrated by "the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space" (Thompson, 2003, p. 82). The social context of higher education may be new to non-FGS, but it is likely to resemble social contexts with which non-FGS are familiar. In contrast, for FGS, this social context of college may be not only new, but also strikingly different than the social context of family, culture, or even previous schooling.

Some aspects of cultural capital that benefit students and are tied to academic engagement are not about concrete knowledge, but rather about knowledge of how to interact or how to comport oneself. These include asking for help from instructors, seeking clarification on assignments, engaging in discussion about course-related topics or other relevant topics of interest, and developing mentoring relationships. Students are not necessarily aware that they do not possess the same capital as other students, nor are they likely to know that academic and

social engagement contributes to intellectual and academic development and success (Soria & Stebleton, 2012, p. 675). Similarly, individuals are not necessarily cognizant of their habitus, or of how it fits in—or does not—with the environment. Nonetheless, a “lack of congruence” between an individual’s habitus and the environment, can leave a student “literally...lost for words” (Thompson, 2003, p. 17). This difficulty could manifest itself in interactions with faculty, both formally and informally.

The Bourdieuan lens seems to offer a likely explanation for first-generation students’ lack of engagement with faculty in and out of class. It is important here to reiterate a qualification to the study: I seek to understand why FGS engage less with faculty. While this type of student engagement is correlated with student success, the answer to the inquiry is not intended to carry with it a value judgment. Gaining a better understanding of why FGS interact differently can benefit faculty, students and colleges alike. The study’s conclusions do not dictate a specific solution, nor do they intend to “turn[] learners into consumers and entrepreneurs who must develop the characteristics of those who persevere” (Henry, 2014, p.111) or to push FGS to “seek to substitute the values and communication systems of the powerful in place of those associated with one’s family and community” (Henry, 2014, p. 111). While all students come to college with cultural capital, those who possess the cultural capital that matches faculty or institutional expectations benefit academically and socially from their capital, while students whose cultural capital differs are at a disadvantage in the academic environment.

The suitability of the Bourdieuan framework to explain the phenomenon cannot be determined until the study has been undertaken. As with most qualitative research, the theoretical framework will be “refined and shaped” (Rallis & Rossman, 2012, p. 106) as the study progresses, and data have been gathered. This study seeks to address the question of why FGS

are less likely to interact with faculty. As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this qualitative study does not test a hypothesis, but the Bourdieuan framework has shaped the issues addressed and approaches used, as well as informed the selection criteria and analysis strategies. Bourdieu's theories provide a permeable lens, rather than a rigid theoretical framework.

First-Generation College Students

Before examining the literature about first-generation college students' (FGS) challenges and successes, it is useful to consider some background information about this population. Through comprehensive analysis of the National Center for Educational Statistics' (NCES) National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), and the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), much is known about their demographic characteristics across campuses nationwide. Compared with non-FGS students, FGS tend to come from a lower socioeconomic background (Terenzini et al., 1996; Ishitani, 2006; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). They are more likely to live at home or to choose colleges that are close to family (Saenz et al., 2007). They are, on average, older (Terenzini et al., 1996; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007; Benson et al., 2010) and more often are married and with dependents (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). They are disproportionately students of color and minorities (Terenzini et al., 1996; Jehangir, 2010; Choy, 2001; Bui, 2005), and are likely to be part-time students (Saenz et al., 2007; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

First-generation college students more frequently start at two-year colleges (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007) because of their less-rigorous prior academic preparation, financial considerations, and/or the need for a flexible schedule (Bui, 2005). Though

the majority enroll in two-year colleges, they are also more likely to attend private for-profit colleges (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) than their non-FGS peers.

Though students whose parents did not attend or complete college are overall less likely to enroll in college than those whose parents are college graduates, a significant number of them do. While 93% of non-FGS students enroll in college, 59% of FGS attend college (Choy, 2001). Looking at enrollment in both two- and four-year colleges, in 1995-96, 47% of all beginning postsecondary students were FGS (Kojaku & Nuñez, 1998).

Attrition is a major issue for FGS, who are almost four times more likely to leave college after the first year, at a rate of 26%, compared to 7% of non-FGS (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Six years after enrollment in college, 55% of non-FGS had bachelor's degrees, compared with only 11% of low-income FGS (Engle & Tinto, 2008). At the four-year college level, public and private schools enroll a similar percentage of FGS, but the retention rate at private colleges is higher (Saenz et al., 2007). Davis (2010) posits that this is because it is easier for FGS to fall through the cracks at large four-year universities, due to the bigger classes, more complicated bureaucracy, and comparative lack of guidance. FGS have higher attrition rates after the first year, as well as after each subsequent year; consequently, they have a lower rate of degree attainment (Choy, 2001). Though they leave four-year colleges at a higher rate than their peers (Terenzini et al., 1996), they are more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree if they start at a four-year college than if they start at a community college or for-profit college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

It can be difficult to determine the exact number of first-generation college students because most colleges and universities do not specifically keep track of this information (Davis, 2010), and because the definition of "first-generation college student" is variable. Analyzing

trends and characteristics surrounding FGS is also challenging because it can be difficult to separate FGS from low-income students, both in terms of collected data and in terms of recognizing the source of challenges that they face. However, their numbers are predicted to increase, in part because of immigration trends: new arrivals to the United States are less likely to have a college degree, and thus their children would be classified as FGS (Davis, 2010).

First-Generation Students' Expectations and Challenges

First-generation college students face academic, cultural, social, and financial challenges in college. Even when controlling for other factors (educational expectations, income, academic preparation, influence of parents and peers), first-generation college status is still a significant predictor of difficulties in college, as Choy (2001) and Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) find in nationwide NCES data, and D'Allegro & Kerns (2010) find through analysis of a single college's institutional data.

Academic Challenges

First-generation students' backgrounds often lead them to be unprepared for college-level work. Many educational researchers, including Ravitch (2011) and Kozol (2005), describe the school conditions of low-income, urban and minority students, who constitute a large majority of FGS. Conditions such as these give students a definite disadvantage. Looking at the NCES and NSSL data, Choy (2001); Engle and Tinto (2008); Davis (2010); Terenzini et al. (1996); and Pascarella et al. (2004) describe how FGS' level of academic preparation is lower, partly due to schools that provide fewer college-preparatory classes or less rigor, and partly due to FGS' not selecting college preparatory classes. FGS also arrive in college with lower critical thinking scores (Arum & Roksa, 2011) and lower self-efficacy (Davis, 2010). Often, they don't know

how to study effectively, and may dedicate a significant amount of time to their studies at the beginning of college, but then become frustrated when the effort does not bring positive academic results (Davis, 2010). In this new and challenging environment, FGS also often exhibit time management problems (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

Cultural Challenges

Using focus groups to gauge students' attitudes, Collier and Morgan's (2008) qualitative study on FGS expectations finds that these students clearly want to succeed, but they do not always know how. According to data from the National Education Longitudinal Study, FGS have less knowledge of how the educational system works (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Examining responses by 452 students at a single university, Mehta et al. (2011) find they FGS lack "active coping strategies" to navigate this new environment or the challenges that come with it. Through in-depth interviews and written narratives with FGS, Davis (2010) concludes that FGS' self-sufficiency makes it difficult for them to seek help. Terenzini et al. (1996), Soria and Stebleton (2012), Collier and Morgan (2008) all report that FGS are less comfortable and less likely to engage with faculty.

According to Bourdieu (1993; Thompson, 2003), the dominant class culture is transmitted and rewarded through the educational system, beginning with elementary school and continuing through college. This makes the challenge for FGS even more significant: Their unfamiliarity with the college experience makes them less likely to be successful in higher education, and a resultant lack of success makes it harder for them to move out of their families' socioeconomic class. Difficulty in knowing how to navigate the educational system can also, in turn, lead to the lack of academic engagement discussed above.

Often, these students' family and cultural backgrounds offer additional challenges, beyond the issues surrounding cultural capital. FGS are more likely to be low-income and minority. Applying Cultural Mismatch Theory, Stephens et al. (2012) speculate that these factors lead to a "cultural mismatch" if a student comes from a culture that expects interdependent relationships, where people are encouraged to prioritize being attentive to others' needs. Cut off from their families, geographically or experientially, students can struggle to maintain their cultural identity while also navigating the college experience (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011). The influence of family can also affect FGS' choices in ways that do not always contribute to academic success or satisfaction. For example, families might encourage or pressure students to major in what they think is practical rather than what students enjoy or are good at (Snell, 2008). Though this could be true in any family, because FGS' families might lack the cultural capital needed in and for college, their advice might lead students away from more beneficial or suitable paths. It also can affect students' course choices or their success in certain classes. Snell (2008) asserts that, in some first-generation college students' families or communities, "socially, going to college is often tolerated only insofar as it provides added value to work" (p 1). In this scenario, courses that are interesting, exploratory or even core requirements are less valued and possibly actively discouraged. Cultural capital informs choices, and FGS' lack of the cultural capital assumed by the educational system affects their academic decisions (Saenz et al., 2007).

Social Challenges

Social capital, the set of societal and professional networks that help inform choices and provide opportunities, is also crucial for college success. FGS face more challenges than their non-FGS peers when it comes to the social elements of college, as well. Even while they might not have the necessary social capital, they may nonetheless sense that the social side of college is

considered to be more important than the academic side, as Bergerson (2007) finds in her comprehensive interviews with a first-generation college student.

For students who go away to college, homesickness is a major issue, particularly for students coming from backgrounds where going off to college is not a usual rite of passage, and where close-knit families are the norm (Bergerson, 2007). On a practical level, these students might miss campus socializing opportunities because they go home frequently (Bergerson, 2007). Orbe (2004) examines 79 FGS narratives and describes how FGS can have difficulty finding a replacement for the communal identity of their families or feel that their own life experiences are unwelcome or irrelevant, as Jehangir (2010) finds through a qualitative study of FGS participating in a specialized learning community. Students who successfully integrate in the college environment might receive less family support (Mehta et al., 2011) or even feel the need to reject their own community (Tinto, 1993).

Being a first-generation college student does not by itself provide a strong sense of communal identity for most students in the way that race, ethnicity, and religion can (Orbe, 2004). Without this sense of community, and removed from their own communities, many FGS feel isolated and marginalized (Jehangir, 2010; Bergerson, 2007), particularly those who are visible minorities on predominantly white campuses (Orbe, 2004).

On a practical level, FGS—especially when they are older, working, or balancing family obligations—may not have time for the more typical college social life (Bergerson, 2007). Such students might struggle with the expectation that college is not just about academics, as expressed by one married student: “I came here for a degree. I didn’t come here to go to college” (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011, p. 63). Data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) indicate that, because of circumstantial factors like family obligations

and because of the lack of the kind cultural capital described earlier, FGS are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities or to volunteer (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008). These students seem aware that they are at a disadvantage, as they have lower self-perceptions of their social self-confidence and leadership abilities (Saenz et al., 2007), but this awareness does not mean they are able to easily overcome this disadvantage.

Financial Challenges

First-generation students' greater social isolation relates to both their academic and financial challenges. They are more likely to work more hours (Saenz et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008), and to work off-campus (Engle & Tinto, 2008), which takes time from academic and social obligations and opportunities. In fact, NCES data show that FGS who work (as did 70%) are more likely to think of themselves as employees who go to school, rather than as students who work (Choy, 2001; Kojaku & Nuñez, 1998), and in general, being a college student is not as much a part of a FGS' identity as it is for non-FGS (Davis, 2010). This diverted focus could add strain to the academic and social elements of college, with which FGS already have disproportionate difficulty. FGS have other financial challenges, as well. They can be more averse to debt (Bergerson, 2007), which contributes to their working more, and often receive less financial support from family (Mehta et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993). Smaller quantitative studies at specific universities illustrate that financial aid can be particularly cumbersome for them, as they have less familiarity with the financial aid process (Dennis et al., 2005), and more stressors about finances (Bui, 2005).

First-Generation Students' Motivations

There is obviously no unified reason that first-generation college students decide to go to college, or a single expectation that they have for it. Some trends do emerge, as FGS tend to be

more motivated by family and family expectations, and by the prospect of financial prosperity (Bergerson, 2007; Bui, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007). To a lesser extent, they cite an undefined desire for “success” and an interest in learning (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Bergerson, 2007; Howard, 2003). All of these motives have their own implications for FGS and for the institutions in which they study.

Family Motivations

When students talk about why they are in college, the theme of family runs through quantitative and qualitative studies (see, for example, Bergerson, 2007; Bui, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012). In some cases, students focus on a sense of family expectation; in others, they desire to bring honor to the family; in still others, they hope to help the family financially.

When asked about their motivations for attending college, first-generation college students differ significantly from their non-FGS peers in the frequency of saying that they wanted to bring honor to the family (Bui, 2005; Stephens et al., 2012) or simply to fulfill family expectations (Bergerson, 2007; Bui, 2005). Similarly, in another study, Mexican-heritage students talked about the “desire to honor parental struggle and sacrifice” (Easley et al., 2012, p. 169).

It is not only the immediate family that motivates first-generation students. Often, they are also driven by the desire to be role models in the community (Stephens et al., 2012). Jehangir (2010) describes how college is not simply about “their own individual hopes, but often the aspiration of their family and communities” (p. 537).

Motives like meeting family expectation are collectivist, and FGS overall seem much more influenced by collectivist motives, while in contrast, non-FGS tend to cite individual motives, such as getting a good job or learning about the world (Dennis et al., 2005). When

asked about why they are in college, first-generation students more frequently use the phrase “have to,” and report being motivated by family, community, or societal pressure, rather than by intrinsic motivators, such as desire or passion (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

Alongside family expectations, FGS frequently cite the desire or need to help family as a motivation for going to college. They are more likely to say that they want to help their families financially (Bui, 2005), as one student expressed in Coffman (2011): “My reason for attending college is because I want to get a job that can support me and a family” (p. 87). While only 31% of non-FGS said that a very important motivation was to “Help my family out after I’m done with college,” 69% of FGS selected this answer (Stephens et al., 2012). In narratives and interviews with FGS, Jehangir (2010) finds that students express hope that college will help them, their family, and their community achieve upward mobility.

Financial Motivations

Although helping family is important to FGS, they are also often motivated by their own desires to be financially well-off (Bui, 2005). “Make more money” was given as a very important or essential reason by 76.4% of FGS (Saenz et al., 2007), and “being well-off financially” was selected by 61.4% of FGS, according to NCES data (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 2008).

The stronger desire to make money may grow out of having experienced poverty or financial difficulties. Many studies have shown that FGS want to do better than their parents (Coffman, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996). For example, one student in Coffman (2011) describes, “Seeing my parents work at factories for most of my life showed me that I did not want to earn a living that way; having minimum wage jobs throughout high school and most of college also reinforced the need to advance my place in society” (p. 87).

Striving for Success

While family and financial considerations are strongest among FGS, this might be partly attributable to the fact that they do not have a well-informed idea of what college offers. As Davis (2010) describes, “Although just about every American knows that getting a bachelor’s degree means getting a better job and making more money, many first-generation students know little more about the benefits of a college education” (p. 44). This helps explain the vague or unarticulated idea of “success” that many students reference. For example, in Easley et al. (2012), high school students say that they want to go to college because they want to be successful. Similarly, in Howard’s (2003) interviews, African-American high school students talk about why they plan to go to college, and their reasons center on the idea that they are good enough students to attend college, and that you have to go to college to be successful. As first-year college student Anna expresses it in Bergerson’s (2007) study, “Good grades is success. It doesn’t matter how many friends you have or what clicks you’re really involved in. It’s just, to me, the grades that you have. Because they define your entire career” (p. 109). These examples offer illustrations of how, though they want to be successful, FGS often either do not define success or articulate an oversimplified view of it, making it synonymous with getting good grades.

Desire to Learn

In Davis’ (2010) in-depth narratives with a wide array of first-generation college students, money or the abstract idea of “success” come up often, but there are a few students who also mention going to college for “learning purposes” (p. 119) or for “evolving” as a person (p. 127). Similarly, in Stephens et al. (2012), 42% of students say that “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” is a very important reason for college, though notably, that is down from 69%

in 1971. Likewise, 78% of FGS cite the desire to “Expand my knowledge of the world,” and 62% mention “Become an independent thinker” (Stephens et al., 2012). In all cases, the percentage of FGS who give each of these answers is lower than the percentage of non-FGS.

Implications of FGS’ Motivations for Attending College

First-generation students’ reasons for going to college are complex and diverse, but clear trends emerge in the analysis of the literature, along with implications of those trends.

First-generation students’ motives for attending college are more often either collectivist—thinking first of the group—or interdependent—expecting that family members will depend on one another. Importantly, Stephens et al. (2012) find that, for FGS, interdependent motives lead to lower grades, while those FGS who decide independently what they want out of college tend to be more successful. In the same vein, predictors of college perseverance include the ability to balance collectivist and individualistic goals, along with having personal interest and intellectual curiosity (Dennis et al., 2005).

Although the frequency of collectivist and interdependent motives is significantly greater for FGS, FGS also seem to simply have *more* motives: When asked to select the “very important reasons” for attending college, FGS chose more reasons than did non-FGS (Stephens et al., 2012). This may be simply because FGS know less about what college can or “should” offer or what the “right” answer is. It could also be that, because FGS usually come from lower-income backgrounds, financial success has to play a role, but that does not preclude FGS’ also embracing many of the motives for attending college that their non-FGS peers express, such as expanding knowledge of the world or developing a meaningful life philosophy.

When a student who comes from a background that has struggled financially sees a checklist of possible motives for attending college that includes financial success, he/she might

be more likely to select that option than a higher income student might be. This might reflect a limitation of the checklist-type questions which might be rectified through an open-ended question. Hauser and Anderson (1991), for example, include this question in their interviews of high school seniors: “Suppose you could do just what you’d like, and nothing stood in your way. How many of the following things would you WANT to do?” In order to gain a deeper understanding of FGS’ motives beyond wanting to be financially well-off, a similar question might be posed to first-year students.

Another factor in why FGS are more likely to cite financial success as a motive for attending college might be society’s “degree inflation” and push to get more students to enroll in college. Many jobs that used to require only a high school degree now require a college degree, and it has become more difficult to earn a living wage with only a high school diploma. For at least three decades now, college attendance has been the “norm rather than the exception” (Labaree, 1997, p. 46), and, according to Labaree (1997), our contemporary society values credentials above learning. While higher education can be viewed as having the goal of democratic equality or social efficiency, social mobility is the primary purpose in today’s society, stressing “individual status attainment” (Labaree, 1997, p. 51), and the primary purpose of a college degree is to get ahead. First-generation college students may hear this societal message more loudly than non-FGSs.

Helping First-Generation Students Succeed

The most concrete measures of first-generation students’ success in higher education are enrollment in college, retention, and degree attainment. Much attention has been paid to increasing the number of Americans who earn a college degree. Labaree (1997), who examines the conflicting and simultaneous goals of American education, reminds us that, if we as a society

promise equal access to education for all Americans, we have to include higher education, too. The study by Stephens et al. (2012) suggests that, for FGS, college experiences are a stronger predictor of whether students will complete their degree than they are for non-FGS.

As college education becomes more of a necessity for obtaining or maintaining a middle-class life, it is our obligation in higher education to find ways to assist students in attaining their educational goals. Factors that have been shown to improve first-generation students' success rates include family support, a sense of belonging in college, interaction with faculty and students, adequate academic preparation for and support in college, a clear understanding of expectations in college, and access to adequate financial aid. The financial aid aspect, while crucial, is outside of the scope of this literature review; suffice it to say that the ability to pay for college is paramount in a student's ability to attend and graduate from college. Aversion to debt or the added challenge of balancing work and school can be detrimental to attendance in or completion of college.

Family Support

Many researchers have found that a family support system is one of the most important factors in a first-generation student's success in college. Dennis et al. (2005) and Bergerson (2007) both say it is crucial, and Coffman (2011) similarly reports a strong relationship between parental involvement and success. According to McCarron and Inkelas (2006), the level of education that a FGS aspires to is best predicted by the level of parental involvement and support. In a similar vein, in a case study, Cabrera, Nora and Castaneda (1992) report that encouragement by friends and family plays a big role in retention. Unfortunately, many students report a lack of family support and say that, when it is provided, support is often generic, lacking the level of understanding, advice or enthusiasm that students desire (Coffman, 2011).

Sense of Belonging

Virtually by definition, first-generation students must leave a familiar environment or community in order to attend college. In some cases, this departure might seem minor, as when a FGS lives at home and commutes to school, or when a Native American FGS goes to a tribal college. In other cases, the departure is more significant, as in the case of a FGS going to a residential college far from home. In nearly every case, however, there is a cultural shift to which a FGS must adapt: Coming from an environment in which college is not the norm and arriving in a place where fluency in the language of college is both expected and necessary, FGS must adapt, and often, this adjustment has to take place quickly in order for the student not to fall behind. Making first-generation students feel welcome and at ease despite their comparative sense of alienation is important. This can be achieved when colleges create an inclusive environment. Looking at retention, Tinto (1993, first edition 1987) finds that non-traditional students' involvement in subcommunities is helpful. Tierney (1992) puts more responsibility on the colleges, suggesting that the institutions should use an "integrative framework" to "offer alternative strategies for developing multicultural environments" (p. 616). In fact, in contrast to Tinto (1993), Tierney (1992) asserts that colleges are obligated to create a welcoming environment for FGS, and that they have to move away from a model that pushes the FGS students to integrate or assimilate and move towards a model of emancipation and empowerment. Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) propose a specific example of this, called SIRPS (Student-Initiated Retention Projects). Based on the idea that students drop out because they are unable to integrate with the university, SIRPS help students gain cultural and social capital, and develop necessary knowledge, skills, and networks. Although SIRPS have focused on students of color, they address the same issues that FGS have.

Interaction with Faculty and Students

One aspect of cultural and social capital connects to the ability or willingness to interact with faculty and students. Many studies have shown that first-generation students struggle with this but that private colleges are more successful than public colleges in engaging FGS, likely because of the smaller classes and on-campus residence (Saenz et al., 2007). Engle and Tinto (2008) argue that colleges and universities need to encourage student engagement, and other researchers are adamant about the importance of this for FGS (see, as examples, Tinto, 1993; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Davis, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1996). Soria and Stebleton (2012) are clear about the link between faculty-student interaction and student success: “The extent to which first-generation students are academically engaged in the college classroom can impact related academic-intellectual developmental outcomes” (p. 675).

One challenging element of engagement for FGS is faculty interaction (Tinto, 1993; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Davis, 2010). Coffman (2011), for example, asserts, “Working class FGS need to be encouraged to communicate with institutional professionals through email and face-to-face interaction” (p. 84). In his comprehensive study of student retention, Tinto (1993) finds that students benefit from having more contact with faculty—not just socially, but centered on academics. FGS, in particular, need to feel that they belong, especially in class (Davis, 2010). Ideally, faculty initiate and encourage such interactions, and higher education institutions support them.

There are innovative programs, while not necessarily designed specifically for FGS, that can foster faculty-student relationships. For example, Cook-Sather (2010) describes a program that uses college students as pedagogical consultants for college instructors. These students are employed to give feedback about teaching and learning to participating instructors, which pushes

students to be “more conscious of and actively engaged in the learning and teaching process” (p. 559). It also necessitates sustained interaction, while empowering students and helping them learn how to interact with faculty.

First-generation college students often need to be encouraged to interact with faculty; similarly, they also often need encouragement to interact with other students. As discussed before, FGS have lower levels of participation in extracurricular activities and study groups, though research shows that they benefit more from them (Pascarella et al., 2004). Davis (2010) and Coffman (2011) suggest rectifying this by requiring FGS to take part in study groups, and Engle and Tinto (2008) recommend that instructors assign more cooperative and problem-based learning work (and that colleges provide faculty development to ensure that these assignments are well-executed).

Learning communities can help students feel connected to the institution (Engle & Tinto, 1993), and multicultural learning communities can play a particularly useful role (Jehangir, 2010). In some cases, though, FGS are hindered by such communities, as they are sometimes isolated with other FGS, and thus less integrated in the college community overall (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

Academic Preparation and Support

Clearly, engagement is important, and fostering a sense of connectedness is valuable for FGS. However, it is important to also focus on the importance of academic preparation and support for such students, which starts before they have even graduated from high school and continues through their graduation from college.

Although they focus on students’ experience in college, Engle and Tinto (2008) address the importance of improving first-generation students’ academic preparation for college. These

students are less likely to have been on a college-prep track, either because their school did not have one or because they did not choose or were not assigned to it. Analyzing NCES data, Engle and Tinto (2008) suggest that first-generation college students also need to have access to more information about preparing for and succeeding in college. Dockery & McKelvey (2013) make similar recommendations in their study, based on surveys of 126 pre-service teachers.

The transition from high school to college can be eased through orientations and bridge programs (Engle and Tinto, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1996; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). According to Lowery-Hart and Pacheco (2011), these and similar programs for FGS are often insufficiently publicized. Davis (2010) strongly advocates that “first-generation college students” be included as a standard demographic category in admissions and advising, so that higher education institutions can collect data and create services to lessen FGS isolation.

Engle and Tinto (2008) point out that rather than simply improving access to college for first-generation students colleges should work to improve their persistence. In addition to the orientation and bridge programs, FGS benefit from tutoring and special programs (Engle & Tinto, 2008), early intervention (Engle & Tinto, 2008), and more advising until a major is chosen (Terenzini et al. 1996). Tinto (1993) looks at an interesting, related issue: Some schools see students’ uncertainty about a major as a problem, and push students to select a major early on. However, Tinto (1993) finds no evidence of uncertainty being an indicator of a problem during the first year, though students who are still undecided about their major after the first year do have a higher attrition rate.

Expectations

As discussed earlier, many FGS view college primarily or exclusively as a pathway to a good job. According to Bok (2006), colleges are obligated to prepare students for life after

graduation in areas that extend far beyond this. In addition to preparation for work, Bok (2006) argues that colleges ought to prepare students for: communication, critical thinking, moral reasoning, citizenship, living with diversity, living in an increasingly global society, and having a breadth of interests. Though not all colleges or curricula follow these recommendations, they motivate discussion and decisions in higher education, and contrast significantly with the simple goal of finding the major that leads to the most money. In fact, many of these areas are likely to be the kinds of things that someone with certain cultural and social capital might know, but of which FGS might not be aware. Thus, again, a student with the “right” cultural and social capital might understand the reasons for certain courses or curricula, while a student without that capital might feel alienated, or feel that he or she is wasting time and money in higher education.

Because FGS may view the purpose of college differently than non-FGS and, perhaps more significantly, their view may differ from what institutions of higher education expect, it could be useful for colleges and universities to encourage discussions of what college is “really” about. FGS’ coursework and evidence of why and how they select their majors bring important data to this conversation. For example, family influence strongly affects first-generation students’ choice of majors. According to Davis (2010), FGS take longer to choose a major; Terenzini et al. find, (1996), however, that once they do select their majors, FGS are more sure of it and less likely to change their minds. Chen and Carroll (2005) illustrate the latter, pointing out that 33% of first-year FGS are undeclared, compared to 13% of their non-FGS peers. FGS take fewer credit hours (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). They have lower GPAs and withdraw from courses more often (Chen & Carroll, 2005). They take fewer humanities and fine arts courses (Terenzini et al., 1996) and are more likely to choose majors connected with high-paying jobs, without seeking guidance and with an “incomplete” understanding of the

relationship between college and career (Davis, 2010). While non-first-generation students are more likely to identify a “personal identity” motive for their major selection, such as “I want to help people,” FGS are more likely to name “circumstantial” motives, such as “I had to study this because my family wants me to” for their choice of major (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

Recommendations

Taking into consideration the aforementioned financial and familial circumstances, FGS’ motives for attending college reflect their background and experiences, but they do not reflect the reality of college, especially for students at liberal arts colleges and in non-vocational majors. To assist students with this dissonance, Davis (2010) suggests that students should be encouraged to express why they are in college, and that universities should be as clear as possible about what university life is like and how one studies successfully. Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), meanwhile, provide more guidance: “Professionals working with first-generation students should not focus only on revealing the extrinsic rewards (e.g., financial) of academic achievement but also on the intrinsic rewards (e.g., enjoying learning for the sake of learning) that can lead students to increase their study skills and decrease their absenteeism” (p. 973). Tinto (1993) writes that college should be about personal growth and new social and intellectual experiences. Given that this is often *not* what FGS expect, institutions of higher learning need to lead FGS to a more complete understanding of college.

Faculty-Student Interaction

Research shows that faculty-student interaction correlates with numerous positive outcomes for college students, including in the areas of students’ academic achievement, satisfaction with their college experience, intellectual development, and likelihood of persisting

in college (Lamport, 1993). Though widespread research in the field of college student engagement and involvement has existed since the 1960s, this research initially focused on the broader student experience and was primarily theoretical (Lamport, 1993). In addition, earlier research did not investigate how faculty-student interaction affects students from different backgrounds in different ways.

While smaller studies in the late 1970s explored the outcomes of student-faculty engagement, the 1990s brought more empirical studies which not only investigated the changed outcomes derived from specific aspects of student involvement, including student-faculty interaction, but also disaggregated groups of students (Kim & Sax, 2009). These studies indicate that students from different backgrounds and in different college environments benefit from interaction with instructors, though there is variation in the extent and type of benefits, as will be discussed later in this literature review. The overall effect is clear: in their analysis of the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), taking a representative sample of 5409 students across 126 colleges and universities, Kuh and Hu (2001) found ties between every kind of faculty-student interaction and the improvement of at least one aspect of the student learning experience.

According to Endo and Harpel (1982), faculty-student interaction is strongly correlated with student satisfaction about all aspects of college, and has a positive effect on a wide range of personal and social outcomes. Kim and Sax's (2009) research echoes this nearly three decades later, demonstrating that faculty-student interaction is positively correlated with satisfaction with the college experience. Finally, Kuh and Hu (2001) look at student engagement, and determine that the frequency of student-faculty interaction is connected to participation in other "educationally purposeful activities" (p. 321).

“Faculty-student interaction” encompasses a number of different kinds of communication and contact, including informal and formal out-of-class meetings, such as conversations in the library or office hours, as well as discussions about course-related topics, career plans, academic issues or personal topics. It also includes in-class involvement, such as participating in class discussions and answering or asking questions in class. Studies most often include multiple types of student-faculty interaction, including both formal and informal (e.g. Tinto, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kim & Sax, 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Cox, 2011), while a few focus only on out-of-class communication (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Collier & Morgan, 2008).

As mentioned above, faculty-student interaction means many things. For example, it might be a student asking questions about an assignment or concept that is not understood, or it might be a student pursuing knowledge or intellectual interests outside the scope of class. It can be difficult to know a student’s motivation in interacting with a faculty member. Some kinds of interactions may be an indication of a lack of academic preparation or of learning challenges, while other kinds could indicate a greater comfort level with faculty, or more self-confidence. Different motivations can lead to different (though both successful and unsuccessful) outcomes. For example, a student’s discussing course-related content with an instructor may reflect that the student lacks understanding of a concept, and thus benefits from getting instructor clarification, a benefit possibly reflected in a higher grade. However, a different student might be discussing content that is tangentially related to the course because he/she has a passion, or is developing a passion, for the subject; while this might be beneficial to the student’s intellectual growth, it will not necessarily be reflected in a student’s grade. Because the majority of studies contained in this literature review are quantitative, the focus is on correlation, rather than motivation or causation.

In one qualitative study at a residential college within a large state university, Cox (2011) does explore students' reasons for interacting with faculty, reporting that most encounters between faculty and students are incidental and functional—focused on grades or a question about an assignment, for example. While students described their interactions with faculty as “powerful” (p. 52), and despite colleges' efforts to encourage students to meet with faculty, “relatively few students were engaged in more than occasional, or superficial, conversations with the college's faculty” (p. 50). In fact, while the positive effects of faculty-student interaction seem clear, Koljatic and Kuh (2001) looked at the CSEQ from 1983 through 1997, and based on 73,000 students' responses, determined that there has not been significant change in the amount or type of interaction in that span of time.

Differences Across Groups

Although as stated earlier, faculty-student interaction is positively correlated with beneficial outcomes for students from all backgrounds, certain students seem to benefit in different ways and to varying degrees. Lundberg and Schreiner's (2004) study of the CSEQ from 1998-2001 demonstrates that students of color benefit most from this interaction. Related to this, and controlling for socioeconomic level and pre-college academic preparation, Kuh and Hu (2001) find that African-American students are more likely to interact with faculty. In the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experiences Survey (UCUES) of 58,281 students, Kim and Sax (2009) also report that African-American students interact with faculty more than White students, while Asian students interact less; relevantly, in contrast with Lundberg and Schreiner's (2004) findings, they also determine that this interaction has less effect on African-Americans' GPA and satisfaction with college than it does for the other groups.

Based on the 1997 CSEQ, Anaya and Cole (2001) identify three statistically significant variables impacting Latino/a students' achievement: Feeling they have a quality relationship with the faculty, talking with faculty, and visiting faculty informally after class. Each of these positively correlates with achievement.

Studies have also examined how social class impacts students' interaction with faculty. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to communicate with faculty, either in person or by email (Kim & Sax, 2009), even when controlling for academic preparation.

Although FGS have lower levels of interaction with faculty in all categories—formally and informally, in-class and out-of-class—they do not differ from their peers in the benefits they derive from course-related interactions. This is evident in their career aspirations, their sense of belonging on campus, their critical thinking and communication gains, and their overall satisfaction with their college experience (Kim & Sax, 2009).

In another recent study, Wang (2013) interviewed a purposive sample of 30 FGS at different points in their college careers, asking them to describe their experiences with faculty, and more specifically to identify how faculty facilitated these “turning points” during college. When FGS view instructors as more approachable, they are more likely to interact with them. This in turn empowers students and gives them a sense of ownership of their learning, as well as an additional resource on campus, which can “play a pivotal role in helping facilitate FGS’ academic and social integration” (p. 78). Focusing specifically on the first-year experience, “[s]tudent-teacher relationships, particularly interpersonal student-teacher relationships, can help first-generation students overcome the challenges they may face as they take stock and take charge of the transitions to college” (p. 78).

Learning and Academic Performance

Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theoretical Framework, foundational to the study of student experience in college, concludes that increased student involvement of all types, including faculty-student interaction, leads to greater learning and personal development. Learning gains and improved academic performance are both aspects of the college experience that are positively correlated with faculty-student interaction. Kim and Sax (2009) find that for students overall, course-related student-faculty interaction is associated with higher GPAs, larger communication and critical thinking gains, greater satisfaction with college, and higher degree aspirations. Kuh and Hu (2001) and Lamport (1993) caution that the direction for the causality of this relationship has not been determined. While the inability to determine causality is a limitation of much quantitative non-experimental research, there is compelling evidence that a strong correlation exists.

According to Lundberg and Schreiner (2004), "Quality of relationships with faculty was the only variable that significantly predicted learning for all the racial/ethnic groups" (p. 555). They also find that interaction with faculty affects the total variance in student learning more than do background characteristics.

Similarly, in one of the foundational studies on faculty-student interaction, Pascarella et al. (1978) studied 1008 students at Syracuse University and determined that interaction with faculty outside of class had positive effects on students' academic motivation. Additionally, they found that this interaction accounted for a significant portion of the variance between predicted and actual first-year academic performance.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1978) were among the first to study different types of faculty-student interaction, which they divided into six categories, including conversations that

were course-related, personal, and social. They determined that the interaction about course-related matters correlated with the most positive effects for students. Again, it is important to recognize that no determination of causality was sought. In further analysis of this data, Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) identified that the frequency and strength of student-faculty informal relationships significantly impact students' self-perception of their own intellectual and personal development. In another central contribution to early research, Endo and Harpel (1982) studied 2,830 students, surveyed in their first year and then four years later, finding that both formal and informal student-faculty interaction has a positive effect on students' intellectual outcomes--though not on their GPAs.

Longer-Term Positive Outcomes

Although some studies (Kim & Sax, 2009; Endo & Harpel, 1982) have determined that academic performance as measured by GPA is not always significantly correlated with faculty-student interaction, studies indicate other long-term positive outcomes. Based on a longitudinal path analysis of data from 418 undergraduate students at two universities, Hearn (1987) suggests that faculty-student interaction plays a role in students' plans for graduate school. Kim and Sax (2009) also describe a positive overall correlation between faculty-student interaction and degree aspiration.

One final positive outcome of value to both students and higher education institutions is higher retention rates. Chang (2005) studied 2,500 community college students and showed that faculty-student interaction is tied to lower levels of attrition, particularly for minority groups. This connection between interaction and retention mirrors earlier findings at the university level by Pascarella and Terenzini (1977).

FGS and Faculty-Student Interaction

First-generation college students (FGS) are less engaged than non-FGS. In particular, they are less likely to interact with faculty formally and informally, in class and out of class. Numerous reasons for this phenomenon have been considered. As discussed in this literature review, they are more likely to work off campus, and they work more hours than their non-FGS counterparts. They also come to college less prepared, and thus may be overwhelmed or intimidated. The difference in their levels of engagement may be the direct effect of their lower educational objectives and the increased likelihood of their living off-campus (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Pike and Kuh (2005) also suggest that it may be “because they know less about the importance of engagement and about how to become engaged” (p. 290).

We can connect FGS’ lack of engagement with their uncertainty of how to behave, along with their lack of confidence about their roles. What looks like apathy in class, for example, might simply be students observing and taking in their environment, or might be a student’s way of dealing with feeling like an “imposter” on campus and not wanting to be found out (Davis, 2010). The disengagement is not only an in-class phenomenon. Faculty interaction is also valuable outside of class, as will be discussed in the next section. There are additional examples of disengagement outside of class: FGS are less likely to be in study groups or otherwise interact with other students, and they more rarely seek support services (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In addition, they self-report having fewer out-of-class academic experiences than their peers (Terenzini, et al., 1996).

Often, FGS’ academic challenges result from a lack of relevant knowledge, along with an awareness of how to behave and interact in the college environment. In other words, they may lack the specific cultural capital—the knowledge and skills necessary to attain or maintain a

higher status in society—that can lead to their success (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). First-generation college students have not had the same experiences as their non-FGS peers to prepare them for the college world (Pascarella et al., 2004). Because their parents do not have the first-hand experience with the demands of college, FGS are less likely to have learned, directly or indirectly, what to expect from college or what is required for success (Davis, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Surveying thousands of students across 24 institutions, Terenzini et al. (1996) and Soria and Stebleton (2012) show that FGS are less comfortable interacting with faculty, and generally have less contact with their instructors. In focus groups with FGS and non-FGS students at a large urban university, Collier and Morgan (2008) find that they also seem to be less likely to know what faculty want and expect, don't come to faculty with problems, and are intimidated by faculty. Because Collier and Morgan's (2008) study relied on focus groups rather than individual interviews, it is possible that only more confident voices were heard. Unlike my proposed study, Collier and Morgan (2008) concentrated on why FGS received lower grades on assignments and tests, and in classes overall.

FGS also indicate lower rates of feeling that faculty are approachable or of meeting with faculty outside of class. Davis' (2010) interview subjects reveal a lack of comfort with participation in and out of class. These interviews, conducted when students were in their later years of college or had already graduated, did not delve into the reasons for FGS' discomfort, or whether their lack of comfort led to their being more reserved or avoiding faculty-student interaction.

A longitudinal study of 4,000 students at several colleges and universities, the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), indicates that first-generation college students are less

interactive with faculty (Terenzini et al., 1996). In a more recent study, Soria and Stebleton (2012) use data from the Student Experience in the Research University survey of 1,865 students at a large public university shows that FGS have a lower frequency of interacting with faculty, contributing in class, or asking questions.

Analysis of the large-scale Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS: 04/09) longitudinal study from NCES indicates a similar trend. Surveys of 16700 students at the end of their first year (2003) and again at the end of their third and sixth years show that FGS are less likely to talk to faculty outside of class or to meet informally with them. For example, among students whose parents complete high school or less, nearly 15% never interacted with faculty outside of class, whereas 8.7% of students whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree reported never interacting with faculty. Similarly, while 53.8% of students whose parents were college graduates said they "sometimes" or "often" met informally with faculty outside of class, only 44.3% of students whose parents did not attend college answered "sometimes" or "often."

Similarly, using data from the Collegiate Learning Assessment Longitudinal Project (CLE) of 2,352 students at 24 representative 4-year institutions in 2005 and 2007, Arum and Roksa (2011) show that FGS are significantly less likely to think faculty are approachable. One illustration of this is that students whose parents did not attend college report significantly fewer meetings with faculty (2.94 meetings) than do students whose parents graduated from college (3.55 meetings) (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Though the difference between the number of meetings may seem small, the trend is consistent across studies. Given the abundance of evidence that meeting with faculty benefits students, even a fairly small, but still significant, difference is worth considering.

With both the CLE and BPS, as parental education level increases, there is a commensurate increase in the frequency of interaction that students have with their instructors. Using the previous statistics as an example, students whose parents had some college report 3.21 meetings, while students whose parents have a graduate or professional degree report 4.11 meetings (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that there is ample evidence that FGS derive benefits from faculty-student interaction (e.g., Tinto, 1993). This review also has shown that FGS are less engaged in and out of class, and less likely to seek out faculty. Though there are a number of studies illustrating this lack of engagement and interaction, there are few studies exploring the question of *why* FGS have lower levels of faculty-student engagement. There appear to be no studies that directly pursue this question with FGS, and compare their responses to those of non-FGS. My research seeks to fill that gap by qualitatively investigating FGS' perceptions both of the role that interacting with faculty plays in college success, and of faculty-student interaction itself. My research also examines the origins of these perceptions and draws comparisons between FGS' and non-FGS.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research project employed an interpretive qualitative study design. Merriam (2009) explains that, with a “basic, interpretive study” (p. 22), “[t]he overall purpose is to *understand* how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). As with all qualitative research, such studies are “interested in how meaning is constructed,” with the primary goal of “uncover[ing] and interpret[ing] these meanings” (p. 24). Using this design, I was able to assess students’ perceptions of aspects of faculty-student interaction. Through students’ questionnaire responses, followed by one-on-one and focus group interviews, the interpretive qualitative design allowed an in-depth exploration of both students’ perceptions and the origins of those perceptions, as well as the motives, encouragements and impediments they identified to interacting with faculty. The study design was emergent and flexible, as recommended by Merriam (2009).

Many of the studies discussed in Chapter 2 compare FGS and non-FGS. This dichotomy may oversimplify students’ backgrounds, experiences, and differences, however. While my study employed the definition of FGS as one whose parents did not have a four-year degree, the questionnaire intentionally provided far more comprehensive categories for parents’ education level. This allowed me to explore the variance in and between groups and gain a better

understanding of how students' first-generation status influenced their perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

The goals of the study were to understand how incoming first-year students perceived engagement with faculty, and whether they believed that interacting with faculty in class or out of class is important for college success; and to examine the motives, impediments and encouragements that students perceive to interacting with faculty. The study also aimed to contribute to our understanding of how first-generation status influences students' perceptions about interacting with faculty, specifically examining the origins of those perceptions.

Research Questions

1. How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?
 - a. How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college student success?
 - b. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?
 - c. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?
 - d. How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?
 - e. Do FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction change during their first semester, and if so, how?
2. What is the origin of FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?
 - a. What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?

- b. How does FGS status relate to the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?

Design

The study design comprised three phases: questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. The questionnaire and individual interviews were piloted prior to the implementation of the study, and minor changes were made to the instruments and study design based on the pilot. These phases and the pilot are described in detail in this section.

Questionnaires

The first phase of the study commenced during the students' first week of their summer term, when I visited three classes, averaging 16 students per class, in the Summer Academy program. I arrived in each class at the end of class time. Once there, I introduced myself and explained that, while they had met me in the capacity of coordinator of the summer program, I was there now in the role of graduate student, working on a research project. Reading from the script, I explained the project to the students, and asked for volunteers to complete the questionnaire. The short turnaround time from questionnaire to interview meant that potential participants under the age of 18 could not participate in the study, as they would not have had time to obtain a signed consent form from their parents or guardians. The fact that I was not able to include minors in the study was a change from the original research plan. When soliciting volunteers for the study in the classes, I stated that only students who were 18 or older were eligible to participate in the study.

After signing the consent forms, participants in this first phase of the study completed the questionnaire. Along with the research-related questions, the questionnaires prompted students to

indicate their ages and to mark whether they were interested in participating in the second phase of the study, the interviews. Thirty-eight students completed the questionnaire. Of these, two wrote that they were 17 years old, so their questionnaires were discarded. Of the remaining 36 participants in the first phase of the study who had completed the questionnaires, twenty indicated that they were willing to be interviewed.

Based on the demographic categories in the questionnaire—family income, race, language(s) spoken at home, gender, and first-generation status—it was apparent that the participants in the questionnaire phase of the study were diverse in all categories except gender. Among the students who indicated a willingness to be interviewed, aside from the fact that the potential participants were overwhelmingly female, there was, likewise considerable diversity in all demographic categories (although to a lesser extent than there had been among participants in the questionnaire phase of the study). Because of this, in conjunction with the fact that the number of students willing to be interviewed was close to the total number of interviews I wanted to conduct, I contacted all twenty students who indicated interest in participating in the second phase of the study, and invited them to schedule individual interviews with me.

This initial contact was made by email. Within two days of receiving the email invitation to participate in the second phase of the study, ten students responded, and interviews with each of these students were scheduled, beginning the following week. In addition to this, three students contacted me separately to schedule interviews: one student who had not been present on the day that I handed out the questionnaires in class approached me in the hallway after class later that week and told me that she was interested in participating in the study; another student, who had completed the questionnaire but not indicated on it that she was willing to be interviewed, informed me in a Summer Academy study hall one evening that she wanted to be

interviewed; and one student who had completed a questionnaire but not indicated on it that he was willing to be interviewed contacted me independently by email to set up an interview. All three of these students mentioned that some of their friends from Summer Academy had been interviewed and that they also wanted to participate. Thus, a small portion of the recruitment process turned out to include unintended snowball sampling.

One week after the initial email, I sent a follow-up email to the ten students who had not responded to my initial email. Two students responded to this follow-up email, and interviews were scheduled with each of them.

The questionnaire asked students whether they would be willing to be contacted by text message. Of the five potential participants who did not respond to the initial or follow-up email messages, three had indicated that they were willing to be contacted by text message. I sent out a follow-up text message to each of these students, and received a response from one. I then scheduled an interview with this student.

In total, of the 20 students who agreed to be interviewed, 16 students responded to my email or text message and set up interviews with me. I attribute this high response rate in part to the fact that potential participants saw me regularly in the campus building where they were taking classes, and in activities related to the Summer Academy program. Additionally, students' awareness that their friends and classmates were participating may have influenced their desire to take part. Although I did not mention the research study to potential participants outside of the classroom recruitment or email and text messages, their frequent informal interactions with me probably influenced their desire to participate, or made them more likely to follow through on their intention to contact me. Although three students had to reschedule their interviews (which two did before the scheduled interview time, by email, and one did after not arriving at the

scheduled interview), all of the students with whom I initially scheduled interviews did ultimately participate in this phase of the study. The interviews took place over the course of the second, third and fourth weeks of the students' first term in college, the summer term.

My intention had been to invite 10-20 students to participate in the interview phase of the study, based on students' demographic responses on the questionnaire. My first priority was to have participants from a wide range of first-generation status backgrounds, and to have at least two students from each of the following categories: a) neither parent had any college experience; b) neither parent had a four-year degree, but at least one parent had college experience; c) at least one parent had a four-year degree; d) at least one parent had a degree beyond a four-year degree. The 16 students who participated in the interview phase of the study fulfilled this intention, as I had four students in category a, four students in category b, five students in category c, and three students in category d.

The original research plan also indicated that students who fell into a category at one end of the spectrum, and/or who had the potential to provide useful insights or experiences, would be specifically considered for inclusion. For example, a student whose parents did not graduate from high school might have been specifically selected. Similarly, a student whose parents both had post-baccalaureate degrees would have been specifically considered for inclusion. Although I ultimately opted to invite all eligible and interested students to participate in the second phase of the study, there were students whose unusual experiences were particularly insightful. For example, I had one student whose immigrant parents had not graduated from high school, and her responses in the interview highlighted how different her experience might have been from a FGS whose parents had completed high school, or from a student with non-immigrant parents.

While inviting participants whose parents had varying levels of education was central to the study, it was also valuable to have a range in the other demographic categories: socioeconomic level (SES), race, gender and language background. This diversity provided greater depth in the study, allowing me to consider the influence of factors beyond first-generation status. Fortunately, the participant sample was very diverse, even without my purposively selecting a diverse group of students. There was an even distribution across the “annual family income” category (though notably, income did not strongly correlate with parental education level). In the category of race, the interview phase included four students who identified their race as “white,” six who identified as “black” or “African-American,” six who identified as “Asian,” “South Asian,” or “Indian,” and one who identified as Hispanic. Regarding language, of the sixteen students, six identified speaking a language other than or alongside English at home.

In addition to this, in the original research plan, I had wanted to include participants whose questionnaires indicated that they had varying perspectives of what it takes to be a successful college student, and of what strengths and challenges they expected. Because the study was intended to include only 10-20 participants, it would have been impossible to have representation of all of the demographic variables included on the questionnaire. Consequently, I planned to use a combination of consideration of the demographic traits and the students’ responses to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire to guide my selection of participants. As it turned out, however, students’ questionnaire responses were generally quite similar to one another; as a result, selecting students with unusual perspectives on what it takes to be a successful college student, or what challenges they anticipated facing, would have been difficult.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I reviewed all of the questionnaires, both from students who agreed to participate in the interview phase of the study and from those who did not. Based on the questionnaire responses, I created a few initial coding categories. However, due to the lack of variation in students' responses, and the fact that students did not directly address their perceptions of faculty-student interactions, or the origins of their perceptions, the questionnaires did not significantly influence the initial or revised coding categories.

Although I had originally intended to load the data from the questionnaires into the qualitative data analysis software program ATLAS.ti and code them prior to the interviews, both because of the paucity of information relevant to my research questions in the questionnaires and because of time constraints, the questionnaire data were not added to ATLAS.ti until later in the study.

Individual Interviews

The individual interviews, conducted during students' second, third and fourth weeks of the term, expanded upon the questionnaire that they completed during the first week, and allowed clarifications of student responses as needed. The interviews took place in a vacant classroom on campus, and were audio recorded. Interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. Immediately prior to each interview, students completed a second consent form for this second phase of the study.

At the beginning of the study, the short questionnaire gave students the opportunity to start thinking about their understanding of student success, and their expectations associated with it, including possible challenges they anticipated. After completing the questionnaire and attending a number of college classes (including both a smaller, discussion-oriented class, and a larger, lecture-style class), students possessed more context for responding to these questions. As

a result, their answers were more detailed, and more rooted in the reality of a college classroom. As a consequence, asking students to talk about the challenges they anticipated, the ways in which they felt confident, and where these perceptions originated, elicited far more substantive answers in the interviews than the questionnaires had.

The questions in both the questionnaire and first interview were intentionally broad for two reasons. First, I wanted to determine whether students, without prompting, mentioned faculty-student interaction as a factor in college success. Doing so might have indicated that the student perceived such interaction to be important. Conversely, not mentioning faculty-student interaction might have indicated that the student did not consider faculty-student interaction to be important; this information was intended to help inform Research Question 1a (“How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college student success?”). Second, I did not want to influence students’ behavior or inadvertently provide an intervention by suggesting what kinds of interactions were optimal.

On the questionnaires, students shared their ideas about the traits of successful college students, and the challenges they themselves anticipated facing. Prior to each interview, I reviewed the participant’s questionnaire, and tailored the first interview questions based on the student’s questionnaire responses about traits and challenges.

In their questionnaire responses, no students mentioned faculty-student interaction directly, and few did indirectly. As a consequence, the interview questions about faculty-student interaction were not elaborations of the students’ questionnaire answers, as originally projected, but rather introductions to the topic of faculty-student interaction to the students. However, when prompted, students did have opinions and perceptions of faculty-student interaction that they were able to share.

Though all students arrive in college with expectations and assumptions about their upcoming academic and social experiences, for incoming first-year students who have no prior college experience (whether they be FGS or non-FGS), these views are not based on personal experience. Rather, these views have been influenced by what students have concluded from other sources: from friends, acquaintances and family, as well as what they have been told by teachers, counselors, or other adults. In addition, the views are possibly influenced by the portrayal of college life in books, television, movies or news. In other words, though students are likely to have preconceived ideas or inclinations regarding faculty-student interaction, these ideas and inclinations may not be realistic. Prior to the study, I assumed that it was possible that these ideas and inclinations might quickly change when students had gained more first-hand knowledge of the college experience. Consequently, I asked about the extent and type of each participant's faculty-student interactions thus far in college, and the factors that influenced the interactions. Additionally, I asked directly about the influence of family and upbringing on the interactions. I concluded the interview by informing students that I would hold a focus group for all study participants later in the fall, and would share the findings of my study there.

After all interviews were complete, the interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were uploaded for analysis to ATLAS.ti, along with the questionnaire responses. I chose to code the interview transcripts in random order, so as to get a balanced sense of students' responses across different spectra (FGS, order of interviews, length of interviews, etc.), and not be influenced in my coding or analysis by the responses of specific groups or influence of specific factors. I used a constant-comparison method for coding, reading through and coding the transcripts, then reading through each transcript again to add to, eliminate or combine initial

codes. After my initial coding, I revisited Bourdieu's theories, adding a few coding categories that bridged the data and Bourdieuan concepts.

After completing my initial coding, I examined my coding categories and the data within each and revised many of the codes to reflect trends that I perceived in the data. The constant-comparison method allowed me to compare my new data to the previous data, and to refine the codes, making sure that they were both comprehensive and mutually exclusive. Often, as I coded, I created memos in ATLAS.ti to clarify codes, record trends as they began to emerge, and note ideas about or apparent contradictions in the data.

After creating and refining the codes for all questionnaire and interview data, I returned to my research questions and examined how the codes fit in with the research questions. After confirming that the codes would allow me to comprehensively answer the research questions, I returned to the coding categories and looked for overarching themes and connections among the coding categories. Ultimately, I settled on grouping the data into four overarching themes: perceptions of faculty-student interaction; origins of these perceptions; motives for interacting with faculty; and encouragements and impediments to these interactions. Within most of these themes, I was able to identify Bourdieuan elements, which I included as I was creating an organizational tree of how the coding categories fit into the overarching themes.

With these themes, coding categories and data, I wrote an initial draft of my findings, keeping track of areas in which I needed to do further research or wanted to gather more data. Many of the points on which I wanted to gather more data helped inform the creation of questions for my focus groups.

Pilot

I piloted the questionnaire and interview with two volunteer students (one FGS and one non-FGS) at the end of the spring semester prior to the Summer Academy. Although these students were completing their first year of college, and thus did not represent exactly the population that participated in my study, this pilot gave me the opportunity to test out questions and confirm that they were clear and that they elicited the kind of information that I was seeking. As a result of the pilot, I altered some interview questions, revised the order of the questions, and added multiple prompts to each question. The pilot also allowed me to assess the amount of time required for a student to complete the questionnaire and the interview.

Focus Groups

After collecting and analyzing data from the questionnaires and interviews, I invited all participants from the second phase of the study to participate in a focus group during the fall semester. In the focus groups, I shared the study's findings, asking participants to affirm their accuracy and make recommendations (See Appendix A for a list of focus group interview questions). I also used the focus groups as an opportunity to clarify certain topics that came up in the interviews. For example, in the interviews, many students mentioned the importance of professors' recommendation letters and of social networking, but I was unsure of the origin of this knowledge. In the focus groups, I asked students to clarify and expand on those ideas.

Although I had originally planned to have a single focus group, I was concerned that students' schedules would make it challenging for them to all attend at the same time. Consequently, I decided to hold two focus groups, one during the week, and one on a weekend. Focus groups were held in a conference room in an academic building on campus. I invited all of the participants from the interview phase of the study to come to either focus group meeting. The

invitations were sent by email, with a follow-up reminder three days prior to each focus group. Four students—one FGS and three non-FGS—came to the first focus group. Initially, only two students came to the second focus group; however, just as this second focus group was concluding, two other participants arrived. I asked those two participants to wait until the focus group concluded, then I conducted a separate focus group for the two students who arrived late. As a result, rather than two focus groups, I ultimately, unintentionally, conducted three focus groups.

The focus groups allowed me to move beyond a study design intended solely to inform scholarship. Inviting students to formulate recommendations potentially useful for current and future students affirmed their agency in the research process. I hoped that it would also benefit the participants by creating greater awareness of their own behaviors, perceptions, and underlying motivations as college students, empowering them to be more confident, capable and aware in their student roles.

In the most productive focus group, the two participants were both FGS whose immigrant parents had no college experience. These two students shared their experiences very openly, and found that, although their families were from different continents and cultures and had immigrated at different times, the students' experiences were surprisingly similar. In the focus group, the students—both of whom had been reserved in the interviews—were very enthusiastic, often jumping in while the other spoke, in order to express agreement or surprise at the similarities in their upbringings and in their interactions with their parents regarding college. Because of the dynamic between these two students, I learned much more about the origins of their perceptions and their experiences prior to college than I had in the interviews. In addition, the students may have had the opportunity to see that their experiences were not as atypical as

they might have previously believed. Given that FGS often feel isolated on campus (Jehangir, 2010; Bergerson, 2007), this interaction might have been encouraging or empowering for these students.

An additional benefit of including the focus groups in the research design was that it provided first-year students with a greater understanding and model of the research process, which could benefit them academically and/or professionally. One of the participants, Kory, commented in the interview that she had done a large research project in high school, so she found it enjoyable to participate in a similar project as a subject rather than researcher. Two other participants, Vashti and LG, thanked me repeatedly for allowing them to be a part of the study, and indicated that the process was interesting for them.

Immediately after the focus groups, I transcribed the interviews and added them to ATLAS.ti. I then examined how the data from the focus groups fit in with my existing coding categories, and determined whether the current connections between the coding categories made sense. Although I did not need to add any new coding categories, I did revise some of my conclusions, and found connections between categories which had not previously been apparent to me. I also was able to add more background and personal information to my descriptions of the participants, which had the additional benefit of improving my understanding of their responses.

Participants

All of the students participating in this study were enrolled in Urban State University's six-week Summer Academy program. This program was open to all incoming first-year students, though certain groups had been specifically invited to apply: first-generation college students,

graduates of the public school system in the city where the university is located, student athletes, undeclared students, and out-of-state students. The total enrollment in this new program had been predicted to be 75, but turned out to be 54.

In this study, the Summer Academy program was selected as the location specifically because it allowed me to reach students before they had any significant college experience. Due to the small size of the program, it was possible to include all willing participants who were not enrolled in my own course. Inviting all students in the Summer Academy to participate, rather than attempting to identify potential subjects, created an “information-rich” sample (Patton, 2002, p. 230). My original intention had been to use purposeful sampling in the second and third phases of data collection, the interviews and focus groups, in order to create “[i]nformation-rich cases, [which] are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). However, due to the smaller-than-expected number of students participating in Summer Academy, all willing participants were included in the second phase. Despite this, the students came from diverse backgrounds and brought with them a variety of perspectives; thus, the cases turned out to nonetheless be information-rich.

Summer Academy students lived on campus and took two credit-bearing classes: an introductory Sociology class and the first part of a two-semester course in the Core Curriculum, which covers core skills, including writing, oral presentation, and critical thinking. This course is required of all Urban State University students. While all Summer Academy students were in the Sociology class together, the students were divided into four sections of the Core Curriculum courses. Students were randomly assigned to these sections, with one exception: All students who had received Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit in English were grouped into two sections. I served as the instructor of one of the Core Curriculum sections,

as well as coordinator of the Summer Academy program. As coordinator, I helped design the curriculum and gave feedback on the promotional materials for the program. In addition, I organized weekend and other extracurricular activities for the students in the program. The students met me in the capacity of program coordinator on move-in day, which was two days before classes began. Prior to this meeting, they were unlikely to be familiar with me, as my name was not included on any material about the Summer Academy.

The instructors of the Core Curriculum courses in the Summer Academy were all full-time Core Curriculum faculty members who had been employed in this department for five to eight years. (The Core Curriculum program was created eight years ago.) The course is interdisciplinary, and instructors come from different academic backgrounds, including writing, philosophy, mathematics, and history. Generally, Core Curriculum instructors teach only within this department, which means that their students are almost exclusively first- and second-year students. Hiring and promotion within the department are based primarily on teaching and service to the department, and the instructors' passion for teaching is apparent in the way they talk about teaching and learning and the pedagogically-focused faculty development that they pursue. The department also reflects a high level of collegiality, with a great deal of socializing both on and off campus.

All of these factors aid in creating a relatively open and inviting environment, for both faculty and students. There is a lounge area specifically for student use, and all of the faculty offices are located on the same floor of the building in which most Core Curriculum courses are held. As a consequence, students may be more likely to view their Core Curriculum instructors as approachable. Even for those students who are not naturally inclined to engage with instructors, interactions can be inevitable, as students are spending time outside of class on the

same floor in the same building as their faculty members. Core Curriculum teachers also sometimes take their students on “field trips,” visiting locations on or near campus that pertain to course material. For example, one instructor in the program takes her students to the top floor of a parking garage on campus in order to describe elements of the city’s history by pointing out specific relevant architectural sites. Another instructor takes his students to the campus dining hall in order to have them complete an informal ethnography of the area. These kinds of activities provide students with access to faculty-student interaction that might be unique to the Core Curriculum courses, and may be reflected in students’ interactions, or in how they perceive those interactions. While these details about the Common Core are important, participants in this study had just arrive on campus, so had not yet fully experienced the academic climate.

As described earlier, during the first week of the Summer Academy program, I visited each Core Curriculum section at the conclusion of the class period. I explained to the students that I was conducting a study on aspects of the first-year student experience, described the voluntary nature of the study and its expected duration, and invited students to participate in the first phase by completing a questionnaire. In order to ensure that students did not feel pressured to participate in the study, and to separate my role as instructor from my role as researcher, I did not invite the students who were enrolled in my section of the Core Curriculum course to participate. Aside from granting me permission to come to their classes in order to invite their students to participate in my study, the instructors of the other Core Curriculum sections were not involved in the study in any way; this helped prevent students from feeling pressured to participate or concerned about how their responses in the interview or on the questionnaire might influence their instructors’ perceptions of them.

There are a few aspects of the sample that are noteworthy. Of the 54 students participating in the Summer Academy, 21 were student-athletes. In the first phase of the study, student-athletes and non-student-athletes alike completed the questionnaires. In the questionnaires, student-athletes were less likely than non-student-athletes to indicate that they were willing to be interviewed. I did contact those student-athletes, along with the non-student-athletes, who were willing to be interviewed, but only one responded to the invitation to participate in the interviews. Although I cannot be sure of the reason, I suspect that student-athletes' busy schedules precluded their scheduling something additional outside of class, study halls, and practice. As a result of this, only one student-athlete (LG) participated in my study beyond the first phase; however, student-athletes were represented in the questionnaire responses at a rate that exceeds that of a regular college student population.

Also of relevance, like student-athletes, FGS were less likely to indicate a willingness on the questionnaire to be interviewed, and were also less likely respond to my invitation to be interviewed than were the non-FGS. Among the 36 students who completed the questionnaire, 14 were non-FGS and 22 were FGS; in other words, 61% of the participants in the questionnaire phase were FGS. However, in the interview phase, eight of the 16 participants (50%) were FGS. Further illustration of FGS' relative reticence to participate was evident when I contacted students and set up interviews. Of the twenty students initially contacted to participate in the interview phase of the study, the first students to respond were all non-FGS. Subsequently, both FGS and non-FGS responded to the initial email messages, but FGS were less likely than non-FGS to respond to this initial invitation, and all of the students who responded only after receiving the follow-up email or text message were FGS.

Instruments and Procedures

This study's instruments involved a written questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews. Recruitment of participants commenced after receipt of University IRB approval. Potential participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study, and participant consent was obtained at each phase of the study: first in conjunction with the collection of the questionnaire, again before the individual interviews, and finally, prior to the focus groups.

All interviews, which were conducted in a classroom on campus, were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and to request changes if they perceived inaccuracies. After transcription and member checking, the transcribed interviews were uploaded to ATLAS.ti. The focus groups were also audio recorded and transcribed, then uploaded to ATLAS.ti.

Questionnaire

When I visited the students' Core Curriculum classes, students who agreed to participate received a consent form and a questionnaire at that time, which they were able to complete immediately after the class; alternatively, they were given the option of completing the questionnaire at another time and returning it to me at the end of the class the next day. All students chose to complete the questionnaire right away. In the original design of the study, I had planned to offer students a monetary incentive for completing the questionnaire. When I piloted the study, however, I asked the students whom I was interviewing about the idea of offering incentives. They both indicated that, if they were participating in the actual study, they would willingly complete the questionnaire without an incentive. Thus, I opted not to include an incentive for the questionnaire phase of the study; as predicted by the students in my pilot study,

all students willingly completed the questionnaire without an incentive. The questionnaire comprised three short-answer writing prompts, along with demographic questions. While the demographic questions were either open, one-word answers or multiple choice, the short-answer writing responses had room from responses of up to 200 words each; participants tended to provide answers of approximately 50 words. The first question on the questionnaire focused broadly on the student's understanding of factors related to being a successful college student, in and out of class. The second question asked the student what challenges he/she expected, and the final question asked about the ways in which the individual student anticipated being successful as a college student.

On this questionnaire, students were not specifically asked about faculty-student interaction. I wanted to find out whether they introduced faculty-student interaction independently. Additionally, asking directly about faculty-student interaction could have influenced the students' behavior, and thus been an unintended intervention that altered their interactions with faculty in the first semester. The questionnaire was designed to possibly generate information about students' attitudes towards faculty-student interaction, though it did not include any questions that specifically asked for that information. While there was the possibility that some students might have mentioned an aspect of in-class or out-of-class faculty-student interaction in an answer, I also recognized the possibility that some (or even all) would not. In fact, no student directly mentioned faculty-student interaction, though a few students mentioned traits related to that interaction, such as "inquisitiveness," "outgoing," or "people skills."

Whether or not a student included faculty-student interaction was relevant in itself, for it illustrated the extent to which a student was aware of this type of engagement, or had considered

it to be of value. For all students, regardless of whether their responses mentioned faculty-student interaction, the questionnaire was also used in the interviews, to provide students the opportunity to alter their original answers, and to allow me to ask them to clarify or elaborate on their questionnaire answers.

As recommended by Johnson and Christenson (2012), the three questions on the questionnaire used “natural and familiar language” (p. 165) and were “clear, precise, and relatively short” (p. 166). As illustrated in Figure 1, the questionnaire focused on concepts related to Research Question 1 (How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?).

In addition to the three open-ended questions, the questionnaire asked for specific demographic information. The purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to “gather information” with the goal of “understand[ing] the characteristics of a population” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 217). The demographic questions were constructed based on Johnson and Christensen’s (2012) “Principles of Questionnaire Construction” (p. 163) and “Checklist for Questionnaire Construction” (p. 180).

The primary function of the demographic part of the questionnaire was to determine which students to invite to participate in the second phase of the study, although—as mentioned previously—all eligible and willing students were ultimately invited to participate. The demographic information remained important for understanding how a student’s background influenced his/her views. Importantly, the question about parental education level allowed for a broad range of answers. Rather than just asking whether a parent had a four-year degree, the possible answers included a range of education levels, from “Did not complete high school” through “Education beyond 4-year degree (*e.g.* Master’s degree, J.D., M.D., PhD).” The

questionnaire information allowed me to not simply compare FGS and non-FGS, but rather to look for connections between students' non-dichotomous first-generation status and their perceptions of faculty-student interaction. This information enabled me to address Research Questions 1d (How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?) and 2b (How does FGS status relate to the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?).

The questionnaire included additional demographic questions regarding SES, race, gender, race, and language background, which were valuable in the data analysis. Finally, the questionnaire also asked participants to indicate whether they were interested in participating in the interview phase of the study, and if so, to provide their email addresses and—optionally—cell phone numbers, so that I would have contact information for the follow-up interviews with interested participants.

Individual Interviews

The original study plan was to invite students with variation in first-generation status and demographic categories to participate in the interview phase of the study. However, due to the smaller-than-expected numbers, and the diversity in the available population, all eligible and willing participants were invited to be interviewed. Invitations were sent by email, with a follow-up email and then, if necessary, a second follow-up by text message. The interview participants were invited and scheduled for an individual interview with me, estimated to last 30-45 minutes. Although originally intended to take place during the fourth and fifth weeks of the term, the interviews took place over the course of the second, third, and fourth weeks of the summer semester. This change was due to the speed with which faculty responded to my request to come to their class, and the quick responses from the potential participants. Because the study was

intended to collect student responses as soon as possible in their college careers, it was fortuitous that I was able to schedule the interviews for earlier in the semester than initially assumed. Due to institutional regulations, it was not feasible to offer gift cards as incentives to students. Consequently, I purchased water bottles and notebooks as small tokens of appreciation for the study participants.

The purpose of the interviews was to delve more deeply into students' attitudes about in-class and out-of-class faculty-student interaction. Following up on the questionnaires, the interviews were intended to "obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 202) regarding faculty-student interaction. The interviews used the questionnaires as a starting point, and asked students to elaborate on how they viewed student success, and what challenges and strengths they perceived for themselves. Though these questions did not specifically address faculty-student interactions, the hope was that students' answers would indirectly or directly shed light on their perceptions of interacting with faculty in or out of class, and on the importance they attributed to these interactions in ensuring college success. As mentioned before, in the questionnaires, students did not identify interaction with faculty as an important activity, or the willingness to interact with them as an important characteristic. They did, however, mention some tangentially related traits, such as inquisitiveness. Students' answers helped inform Research Question 1a (How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college student success?) To further generate information about this topic, I asked students to elaborate on any answers, either from their questionnaires or the interviews, that indirectly and directly addressed faculty-student interaction. Later in the interviews, I asked directly about faculty-student interaction. These interview questions elicited

information that helped answer Research Questions 1b (What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?) and 1c (What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?).

In the interviews, I also asked students to discuss the basis for their understanding of being a successful college student; in other words, what led to this understanding? The answers to this question helped inform Research Question 2a (What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?). For the interviews, I used an "interview guide approach," which provided an "interview protocol" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 203), guiding me to address the same questions with all participants, but allowing me some flexibility in question order and phrasing. Thus, the data collection was "somewhat systematic" and, more importantly, "[I]logical gaps in data [could] be anticipated and closed" (Patton, 2002, p. 349). In the interviews, this turned out to be very helpful, as some students needed a number of prompts in order to start talking about a topic, while other students took the interview in the planned direction themselves, sometimes anticipating questions or topics before I introduced them.

In the individual interviews, students were asked to describe their in-class and out-of-class interaction with faculty, and the factors that made them more or less likely to engage with faculty. More specifically, students were asked to talk about the ways in which their upbringing might have influenced their interactions. Students were also encouraged to discuss whether their behavior in this regard matched the expectations that they brought to college. For example, they might have found that they felt more comfortable approaching faculty, or more intimidated, than they had thought they would. If students reported a change in behavior or expectation, I asked about the factors that influenced this. These questions allowed me to address Research Questions

1 (How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?) and 2 (What is the origin of FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?) and specifically questions 1b (What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?), 1c (What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?), 1d (How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?) and 2a (What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?).

A chart indicating the connections between the Research Questions and the questions on each of the instruments is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Correspondence of Research Questions and Instruments

Research Question	Questionnaire	Individual Interview	Focus Group Interview
1. How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?	Q 3	Q 1, 6, 10	Q 1
1a. How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college success?	Q 3	Q 1, 10	Q 3
1b. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?	Q 5	Q 4, 7, 11	Q 3
1c. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?	Q 4	Q 3, 8, 11	Q 3
1d. How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?	Q 11	Q 3, 5, 9	

1e. Do FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction change during their first semester, and if so, how?		Q 6	Q 1
2. What is the origin of FGS' and non-FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?		Q 2, 3, 5, 9, 12	Q 2, Q4, Q 5
2a. What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?		Q 2, 3, 5, 9, 12	Q 2, Q 4, Q 5
2b. How does FGS status relate to the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?	Q 11		Q 4

Focus Groups

Once the data from the questionnaires and individual interviews had been analyzed, I invited all participants from the second phase of the study to attend a focus group interview. Johnson and Christensen (2012) identify focus groups as an “especially useful...complement to other methods of data collection” (p. 205). The focus group environment enhanced the data collection; as Patton (2002) describes, in focus groups, “[i]nteractions among participants enhance data quality. Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other” (p. 386). This was particularly true in the focus group that inadvertently had only two participants, both FGS. Thus, the data gathered in the focus groups added to the understanding of how first-generation status influenced students’ perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

Each focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. As recommended by Johnson and Christensen (2012), the focus group was audio recorded. In the focus group, I began with specific questions, the responses to which helped me clarify or deepen my understanding of a

phenomenon. Following that, I shared the results of the study with the participants and gave them an opportunity to respond. Finally, I asked students about recommendations they would make to incoming first-year students regarding faculty-student interaction. The purposes of the focus groups were to a) share the study's findings and implications with the students and thus provide them the opportunity to reflect on how they individually fit into the study's conclusions; b) enhance the study's trustworthiness by checking with participants the accuracy of the results; and c) invite students to make potentially beneficial recommendations for future and current students.

My research findings were significantly revised and refined based on the feedback from the focus group interviews. In addition, the students' recommendations, may lead to further research, inform institutional reform and possibly be immediately applicable to the student participants and other students currently enrolled at Urban State University. Involving the study participants in the research process and the application of the study results corresponds to what Rallis and Rossman (2012) call the "fifth canonical purpose" (p. 116) of research: "*To empower*—to foster, encourage a sense of agency with groups and individuals" (p. 116). Although only eight of the 16 participants from the interview phase of the study took part in the focus groups, the students seemed to enjoy the interactions, and expressed a great deal of interest in the study's findings. Some students attempted to explain certain phenomena, which added useful perspectives and insights to my own understanding and analysis.

Data analysis

The questionnaire served two purposes. First, it was analyzed independently as a written document to reveal students' thinking about what it takes to be successful in college. To a small

extent, student responses to this question, alongside the questions about the challenges and areas of success they expected, brought up some concerns that reflected students' perceptions of in-class or out-of-class interaction with faculty, such as feelings of confidence or concern. Second, the questionnaire asked students to describe what behaviors and attitudes facilitate success as a college student. This set of questions, too, was intended to possibly elicit references to some kind of faculty-student interaction. However, the questionnaire did not ask directly about student-faculty interaction; perhaps as a result of this, examples of faculty-student interaction, such as visiting professors' office hours, participating in class, or getting help on assignments, were not part of students' answers to the question of what they believe it takes to be a successful college student. Consequently, although a student's responses on the questionnaire could have revealed information about how he/she perceived faculty-student interaction, in most cases, the questionnaire more so revealed that students were not consciously thinking about faculty-student interaction and its link to student success in college

After collecting questionnaires and conducting individual interviews, I transcribed responses, uploaded them to ATLAS.ti and analyzed them for themes, key words, and quotes; alongside categories based on the Bourdieuan framework, these dictated the initial coding categories for my data. The coding categories based on the questionnaire responses and interview data were not decided in advance; however, during the analysis, many of the Bourdieuan categories naturally surfaced. All of the categories were revisited and refined repeatedly during data collection and analysis. These categories encompassed concepts and terms such as: "Advice: parents," "Advice: teachers," "Advice: peers," "Familiarity with teachers," "Faculty-student interaction: Impediments," and "Social networking." While coding and clarifying coding

categories, I selected numerous student quotes that illustrated themes and topics that were relevant to my research questions.

The coding and analysis procedures that were described here, and that were used in this study, follow those recommended by Merriam (2009). To the extent possible, I followed Merriam's (2009) suggestion that "the much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 171). However, for the most part, the individual interviews were not transcribed and uploaded to ATLAS.ti until after all interviews had been completed. With the focus groups, however, I was able to transcribe, code and analyze immediately, including between the days that each focus group was held. Once the focus group data was uploaded, I revisited my coding categories and, as discussed previously, affirmed and clarified them, while reexamining the connections I had projected among themes. This iterative process allowed me to develop comprehensive coding categories and ensure that consistent coding was used across all instruments.

Because the interviews took place in a short span of time (16 interviews over the course of three weeks), it was imperative that I followed two additional pieces of advice from Merriam (2009): "Write many 'observer's comments' as you go" (p. 172) and "Write memos to yourself about what you are learning" (p. 172). The observer's comments gave me an opportunity to record a brief analysis of or observation about the participants' ideas while interviewing. At times, this included students' facial expressions or laughter, for example. The memos allowed me to reflect and consider "how [the data] relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Merriam, 2009, p. 2009), which was particularly important given the quick turnaround between interviews. Both observer's comments and memos facilitated my recall when I analyzed the data.

In addition to the information that the questionnaires independently offered, they also helped shape the interviews. Completing the questionnaire provided students an opportunity to articulate perceptions about being successful college students, along with challenges and expected successes; as a result, students may have entered the interviews having given some consideration to the topic. Beyond this, the questionnaires allowed me, as interviewer, to prompt students and/or encourage them to elaborate on the ideas they expressed in the questionnaires.

As described above, after the interview transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti, I iteratively developed coding categories based on key words, quotes, and themes surrounding the research questions. Alongside the codes connected with the Bourdieuan framework, which included references to family background, social networks, comfort level, and other elements of social and cultural capital, the questionnaire- and interview-based categories centered on the participants' perceptions of faculty-student interaction, specifically relating to the encouragements and impediments they reported. They also stemmed from participants' descriptions of the origins of their understanding of faculty-student interaction and their comfort with it. Process codes, indicating shifting views or experiences from before college through the first semester of college, were used as well.

The interviews allowed me to gather additional information on how first-generation status affected students' perceptions of faculty-student interactions and how students assessed the importance of, encouragements to, and impediments to interacting with faculty, in or out of class. Students were asked about how they perceived faculty-student interaction, and the extent to which they engaged in it. Additionally, I asked students to speak about what factors made them more or less likely to interact with faculty, including factors related to family and upbringing.

Although interview transcripts were all uploaded to ATLAS.ti at the same time, the categories developed over the course of data coding. Analysis introduced additional new categories, changed existing categories into a subcategories, and prompted categories to be merged. Merriam (2009) describes the process of creating coding categories as “highly inductive” (p. 183) and “largely an intuitive process” (p. 183) and explains, “This process of refining and revising actually continues through the writing up of your findings” (p. 182). This was in fact the case in my analysis and writing, as I was adding and refining codes well into the writing process.

In conjunction with the demographic information reported on the questionnaires, the interviews also allowed me to look at the responses from students across a broad spectrum of first-generation status, and to determine whether trends emerged, and whether or how first-generation status influenced students’ perceptions.

Finally, the focus groups generated an additional round of data, as participating students not only answered specific questions, but also made meaning of the findings and assessed the accuracy of the conclusions. Student participants’ awareness of the findings might have also empowered them through enhanced awareness of their assumptions, behavior, and the origins of both, allowing them to alter the way they interact with faculty if they desire. In addition to this immediate benefit, the focus groups provided an opportunity for students to formulate recommendations about faculty-student interaction potentially useful to current and future students, as well as institutions of higher education. Of immediate relevance to this study, participants also provided member checking, and findings were revised and refined based on participants’ feedback; this process enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.

In order to further improve the trustworthiness of the study, a qualified peer reviewer reviewed 25% of my questionnaire and interview data, so as to affirm the accuracy of my analysis. Merriam (2009) describes a thorough peer examination as one in which “a colleague...scan[s] some of the raw data and assess[es] whether the findings are plausible based on the data” (p. 220). My peer reviewer read over four individual interview transcripts, and studied the research questions, coding and annotating the transcripts in connection with the research questions. Following that, we met in person and discussed the transcripts and her impressions of them. In this meeting, I looked over her annotations and coding, discussed my findings, and showed her my coding categories. Her annotations revealed observations that were similar to mine, thus offering affirmation of the applicability of the coding categories I had created. In addition to that, she found that the four transcripts that she had reviewed fit in with the themes that I had identified in my own analysis.

In addition to the peer review, I kept a research journal, the details of which are described further in the next section of this chapter. Journaling began before any data was collected, and continued through the gathering and analyzing of data from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups.

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, one aspect of trustworthiness, credibility, is enhanced through reflexivity, which gives researchers the opportunity to “explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Further, reflexivity allows authors to “articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study at hand” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). In this way, researchers

are more transparent about why they have chosen their project, what they expect to find, how they collect their data, how they arrive at their data interpretation, and what values and assumptions influenced how the study was carried out and analyzed.

Throughout this study, I kept a research journal, in which I recorded my expectations and assumptions, along with observations about self and environment. Recording this information began before the study commenced, as there were influences that I was aware of bringing to the formation of and background research relating to this study.

As a faculty member in the Core Curriculum at Urban State University, I am invested in the success of our students and program, and am particularly concerned with the achievement of underrepresented and traditionally lower-achieving students, groups which include FGS. I am also a strong believer in our departmental mission, part of which is to engage students and foster their success in college. One aspect of engagement that we actively encourage with our students is faculty-student interaction. As an instructor, I try to be accessible to my students, and to promote faculty-student interaction for them. This sometimes includes requiring them to come to my office at least one time during the term. My colleagues generally share this attitude, and some of them employ the same methods for engaging students.

My concern about student success extends to other students in the program, as well, and to some extent I had to actively detach this part of myself during the interviews, and to make sure that I was listening rather than offering advice or encouragement. Although I am sure that I was not able to completely detach this aspect of my professional conduct, as I listened to the recordings of the interviews, I felt that I had mostly succeeded in being an impartial interviewer, offering the participants encouragement to talk freely without leading them to give specific answers.

On one hand, my position as a faculty member at this university and specifically in this program could be considered a limitation to the study, since it removed some of the distance between me as researcher and the participants, a distance that many researchers strive for. On the other hand, however, my familiarity with the students—and their familiarity with me—may have been beneficial. As mentioned elsewhere, my relatively high participation rate may have been the result of students' being familiar and comfortable with me. In the interviews, participants were candid, and by the time of the focus groups, their openness and apparent comfort with me had increased. This may be due to the informal interactions they had with me over the summer, in my capacity as program coordinator of Summer Academy. Over the course of the summer and fall, the study participants would occasionally see me on campus and mention something they had thought of that related to our interviews and my study. Although I did not include these comments in my data analysis, they no doubt informed my impressions and understanding of the students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

Additionally, while the study participants were not my own students, they were aware of my role as a faculty member, which likely influenced their perceptions further. From the beginning, the participants were informed of my research goals, and understood that their responses were helping to shape my study, and that I highly valued their contributions. This may have served as an unintended, but likely important and useful, intervention, for these students had the opportunity to interact with a faculty member as an equal, and as a sort of co-collaborator. This in turn may have made many of the student participants more comfortable with the idea of faculty-student interactions overall, and could have particularly strongly impacted the students who were initially intimidated, hesitant, or uncomfortable with their

instructors. As prior research indicates, FGS are more likely to be in this group of students who are less comfortable with faculty-student interaction.

As a faculty member in the Core Curriculum for nearly a decade, and as an employee of Urban State University for 15 years, I care deeply for student success, and about their success specifically at this university. These connections led to my initial interest in the topics of first-generation college students and faculty-student interaction. They also contributed to my role as coordinator of the new Summer Academy, which was the setting for this study. Knowing that the understanding that I gained from this study would be applied to both the Summer Academy and the Core Curriculum influenced and motivated the research focus and study design.

Institutional Review Board

I submitted the necessary application and paperwork to Virginia Commonwealth University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in May, 2015, after successful completion of my prospectus defense. This was intended to ensure adequate time for approval before data collection. Because the study depended on gathering information from incoming first-year students who had just enrolled in college, it was important to begin data collection at the beginning of the Summer Academy program. Summer Academy students arrived on campus during the first week of July.

I received final IRB approval (HM20004741) on July 1. IRB protocol was followed throughout the study.

Trustworthiness

There has been significant debate about whether, and if so in what ways, the traditional quantitative criteria for validity, reliability and objectivity are manifested in qualitative research. Although these concepts are not directly applicable, there are relevant criteria which can be implemented in qualitative research to enhance its trustworthiness. Merriam (2009) describes a trustworthy study as one that clearly demonstrates rigor by incorporating and exhibiting credibility, transferability and dependability.

Credibility can be established through triangulation, member checking and reflexivity. My study triangulated by using multiple sources of data: a written questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. The focus groups also provided an opportunity for student participants to affirm or make suggestions to the data collected and the findings, thus providing member checking. To incorporate reflexivity, I kept a research journal throughout the study, which gave me the opportunity to be transparent about and aware of my expectations, assumptions, and biases. As I collected and analyzed my data, I also kept memos, which related to the data gathered, and which allowed me to reflect on my impressions early in and throughout the study.

The study's transferability is evident in its rich, thick description. While Merriam (2009) asserts that it is not up to the researcher to determine whether a study's results are transferable to other contexts, the researcher is obligated to provide enough contextual description to let readers draw their own conclusions. As Lichtman (2013) suggests, sufficiently detailed and supported methodological explanations allow a reader to decide on the suitability and appropriateness of a study and its results.

According to Merriam (2009), the dependability of a study can be demonstrated through triangulation, peer examination and a research journal. As discussed previously, my data was triangulated, and underwent a peer examination of 25% of my interview data. The research journal also allowed me to reveal my own connections and attachments to the subject of the study (Lichtman, 2013). Through these means, I attempted to maximize the trustworthiness of the study.

(De-)Limitations

The results of this study are delimited to participants in a summer program at a large state university. Though the program is open to all students, only certain groups of students (first-generation college, graduates of the local public schools, undeclared students, and out-of-state students) received invitations encouraging them to apply. In addition, student-athletes were encouraged, and in some cases (men's and women's basketball) required, to participate. As a consequence, the participants in the program overrepresented these groups. As described previously, although student-athletes were overrepresented in the questionnaire phase of the study, only one student-athlete participated in the interview phase; thus, student-athletes were not heavily represented in the study's overall data.

It is important to acknowledge that, because participation in the Summer Academy program was primarily voluntary (with the exception of six student-athletes) and beyond the scope of a regular course of study, the students may not be representative of the university's incoming first-year class. For example, the students in Summer Academy might be considered higher-achieving or more active than students who had not opted to apply. Although all students who applied to the program were admitted, the program applicants may nonetheless have been

above average in certain ways. As a result of these factors, the students in the Summer Academy program were likely to be motivated students who were interested in moving forward in college. The data collected may in some ways reflect this.

Study participants were selected from two large groups: first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students. In addition, I was able to include a population that was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. Nonetheless, because of its qualitative nature, this study is not intended to be generalizable beyond the group already identified.

The students in the class I taught were not invited to participate in the study. Consequently, I did not have any influence on the study participants' grades or classwork, and students were not pressured to participate. However, participants were enrolled in other sections of the same course I taught, and were living in the residence halls with students who were in my class. Additionally, all Summer Academy students and instructors took part in some activities outside of class. As program coordinator, I was in frequent contact with participants outside of the context of the study. As a result, study participants had some personal knowledge of me beyond their interactions with me as a researcher. Though I sought to minimize this effect, it is important to acknowledge its presence here.

Finally, the topic of the study and the method of data collection lead to their own limitation: As a researcher, I was asking about student-faculty interaction. Because study participants knew I was also an instructor, their answers might have been influenced by this awareness. I tried to temper the potential of this cognitive bias by making clear my role as researcher and the fact that the study was completely independent from their coursework or from my position as a faculty member. As discussed in the previous section, "Reflexivity," I was aware of many of the assumptions, attachments and expectations that I brought to this study.

Throughout the analysis and discussion of the data, I attempted to be as transparent and reflective as possible about these influences, and was open to the appearance of other influences on my objectivity.

Reflections on Methodology

This study design differed from the design implemented in other studies on similar and related topics. Though there are a number of longitudinal quantitative studies, I did not find any qualitative studies about FGS and faculty-student interaction that followed students' changes in perceptions or behaviors over a period of time. Although my study spanned a fairly short time, it offered the opportunity to see students' perceptions shift. Being able to continue a longitudinal study such as this one over the course of many months or years would provide still more information. However, even this study's relatively short time span of approximately three months offered an opportunity to examine how encountering a new field might change a student's perceptions or habitus.

The three phases of the study design also allowed for a more multifaceted investigation. The questionnaires revealed students' initial, unprompted perceptions of faculty-student interactions. The individual interviews allowed for more specific and focused questions about students' perceptions and the origins of those perceptions, and afforded me the opportunity to ask students for clarification and/or elaboration. Finally, the focus groups permitted me to receive feedback and additional elaboration or correction on my initial study findings. Additionally, the focus groups gave me the opportunity to ask about specific topics that were insufficiently addressed in the questionnaires or interviews. The interactions among participants

in the focus groups also allowed me to gather more information about the origins of students' perceptions to surface.

Overall, the methodology was effective in eliciting the information that I sought. There are, however, changes that could be implemented. First, certain revisions to the questionnaires might help generate more information. Students' answers on these questionnaires appeared to uncover students' general lack of awareness of faculty-student interaction, a conclusion I drew because students did not mention faculty in their responses about student success or anticipated challenges and strengths. In retrospect, including a question that guided students to explain their perceptions of faculty or their understanding of what faculty-student interaction entailed, or what its function was, could have enriched the data and provided more context for the interviews, without significantly affecting students' behavior.

Second, in the interview questions, because students had had very little interaction with college faculty at the time of our interviews, many discussed their relationships and interactions with high school teachers. This turned out to be informative, but it could have been more useful to have one interview question specifically addressing interactions with high school teachers, and a separate question about interactions with college instructors. In this way, I could have gathered information from all participants about how their interactions with high school teachers informed their interactions with their college professors. This uniformity in the type of data I obtained would have allowed me to more thoroughly examine how interactions with teachers prior to college shaped students' interactions with and perceptions of college faculty.

Finally, more intentionality in the assignment of students to focus groups could have positively impacted the study. The focus group that unintentionally included only FGS whose parents had not had any college experience illustrated that participants' common experiences can

help them feel more comfortable and encourage them to share more than they did in the individual interviews. Collier and Morgan (2008) used a similar strategy in their study of FGS' and non-FGS' understandings of the role of the college student: They conducted separate focus groups for FGS and non-FGS. In their case, the primary motive might have been different, however, in that they may have sought to prevent FGS' and non-FGS' comments from influencing one another. In my case, the motive would primarily be to create an environment that generated more data and that provided consciousness-raising for FGS. Particularly in a larger study, it might be possible to conduct separate focus groups for specific groups of students. Although this could detract in some ways from the benefit that a diverse group of participants received by sharing their cultural capital, it could also further empower certain students, in particular FGS, who might otherwise not realize that their experiences were common or shared.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter examines students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction, the origins of those perceptions, students' motives for seeking out such interactions, and the encouragements and impediments that students describe regarding this interaction. Each section includes an analysis of similarities and differences between FGS and non-FGS. Illustrations of the Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, field, cultural capital, and social capital are noted throughout the chapter, and further explored in Chapter 5.

In order to gain a sense of the value that students initially placed on faculty-student interaction, students' questionnaire responses will first be presented and discussed. This questionnaire revealed that students did not consciously consider a student's ability or willingness to interact with faculty as a central factor in student success. However, while faculty-student interaction did not emerge on the questionnaires, students' answers revealed differences between FGS and non-FGS that were related to their perceptions of college, and to the origins of those perceptions. Students' perceptions about college often contributed to their perceptions of faculty-student interactions. Similarly, the origins of students' perceptions about college were often related to the origins of their perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

This study set out to examine differences in perceptions and origins between FGS and non-FGS, and in certain areas, the interviews revealed differences between these two groups.

However, not surprisingly, these two broad categories proved to be insufficient. With certain topics, the significant difference was not between FGS and non-FGS, but rather between FGS whose parents had no college experience at all and students whose parents had attended college, even if they did not complete a four-year degree. For example, this difference emerged in how students initially perceived of faculty: The answers given by FGS whose parents had gone to college but not completed a four-year degree resembled non-FGS' answers, while the answers provided by FGS whose parents had no college experience stood in contrast to all other students' responses.

In other areas, non-FGS whose parents attended college in another country more resembled FGS. This was the case with the origins of students' perceptions: Both non-FGS whose parents did not go to college in the U.S. and FGS reported that their social networks shaped their perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction.

When it came to faculty-student interaction, and particularly in-class participation, FGS and non-FGS described a similar desire to meet professors' expectations and to show respect for their professors, though there were some noticeable differences in their ideas of why professors should be respected. The largest difference appeared to be the way that FGS and non-FGS in this study viewed their relationships with professors: Non-FGS were far more likely than FGS to talk about professors as current or future equals, while non-FGS more often saw professors as occupying a different social position.

Most likely as a result of these contrasting ways of viewing their relationships with faculty, non-FGS indicated more comfort with professors. FGS, on the other hand, were more likely to initially expect their professors to be mean or frightening. The study's non-FGS, who had more familiarity with what in Bourdieu's terms would be the field of college when they

enrolled, were unlikely to report that their perceptions of, or comfort with, professors had changed significantly over the course of their first months there; in contrast, FGS—particularly those whose parents had no college experience at all—reported significant changes in their perceptions over the course of their first few months in college. This possibly reflects that these FGS were becoming comfortable in this new *field* (an environment where certain rules are understood, and specific kinds of capital and habitus are expected) of the university, and were learning elements of the expected *habitus* (an individual's self-perception and disposition), though their habitus was unlikely to have actively changed in this short span of time.

Examining the origins of students' perceptions, I found that non-FGS in the study based many of their initial perceptions of college on parents' modeling, attitudes, and advice. Non-FGS got specific, academic advice from parents about college and faculty-student interaction, while FGS were more likely to get abstract advice about reaching goals and succeeding in life. Non-FGS and FGS whose parents had some college experience resembled each other and contrasted with FGS whose parents had no college experience at all in regard to advice about college. Non-FGS were often unaware of the influence of their parents' advice or modeling on their perceptions.

For FGS, other factors often substituted for *cultural capital* (necessary knowledge and skills) originating with their families that non-FGS brought to college. Many FGS used their acquired *social capital* (one's ability to access a social network) as a means of acquiring the cultural capital that would help them be successful in getting to and persevering in college. This social capital included networks formed through their parents' customers in a family business, teachers at school, and older peers. In addition to this, certain circumstances appeared to mitigate the lack of cultural capital about higher education that could potentially hurt FGS in college.

These circumstances included influences as diverse as educational background, parenting styles, and hometown characteristics.

When it came to motives for interacting with faculty, FGS and non-FGS in the study were answered similarly. They shared many reasons for participating in class or for seeking out professors: the desire to learn and share opinions, to better understand assignments, and to receive better recommendation letters in the future. Students of all backgrounds expressed that they would be more likely to participate in faculty-student interactions if they were interested in the subject, were prepared for class, felt comfortable among their peers, and sensed that their professors would welcome such interactions. One notable difference that emerged in students' motives for participating in class related to grades: FGS were more motivated to be active in class by the existence of a participation grade, while non-FGS did not generally directly mention grades as an incentive to interact with faculty.

Discussing encouragements and impediments to interacting with faculty, FGS and non-FGS expressed very similar perspectives. Students of all backgrounds described being more likely to interact with a professor if they had an interest in the subject. They agreed that they were more likely to participate in class if they felt prepared and comfortable with their classmates. Finally, many students—both FGS and non-FGS—brought up a professor's personality as a potential encouragement or impediment to interaction: If students felt that a professor was friendly and approachable, they would be more inclined to interact.

Initial Expectations: Questionnaire Results

In the first phase of the study, before the interviews, participants completed a questionnaire in which they described what they thought was necessary for success in college,

the ways in which they expected to be successful in college, and the challenges that they anticipated facing. The questionnaire responses suggested that, in many ways, first-generation status did not influence students' ideas about what is required in order to be successful in college. Students of all backgrounds addressed all of these topics similarly. They said that possessing traits such as "organization," "motivation," and "dedication" would foster success in college. They expressed similar levels of confidence about their ability to get good grades and succeed academically. They had similar worries as well: about their time management, organizational skills, and ability to keep up with classes.

The results of these questionnaires provided an initial look at whether students recognized any aspects of faculty-student interaction as necessary for college success. Neither FGS nor non-FGS directly identified faculty-student interaction as important, which has implications for university programs and for student success. However, certain trends that appeared in the participants' responses may be related to first-generation status, and these trends, in turn, connect to students' perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction.

One interesting difference that emerged in students' questionnaire answers was that, in contrast to their non-FGS peers, FGS often identified certain positive attitudes as traits that would help them be successful in college, while non-FGS tended to name academic or social skills that were specifically applicable to college. For example, one FGS said, "A good attitude is always necessary," while another said that successful college students "try to stay positive in every situation." Multiple FGS mentioned "optimistic" or "positive attitude" as important characteristics of a successful college student, while non-FGS more often mentioned academic skills, such as "organized," as well as social skills that reflected an awareness of specific non-academic challenges that college students face, like "balanc[ing] time to relax" or "manag[ing]

college life appropriately.” This difference may be partially explained by the origins of students’ perceptions, as it may reflect the contrasting kinds of advice and information that FGS and non-FGS received. Because non-FGS’ parents had experienced college life, they might have been more aware of the non-academic aspects of college, and the challenges that accompany those. Additionally, non-FGS’ parents would be more likely to be cognizant of the specific academic difficulties one might face in college, whereas FGS’ parents might only be aware of the idea that college is academically challenging.

An illustration of the different types of advice that FGS and non-FGS received emerged in the interviews. FGS described that their parents’ advice about college focused broadly on life, attaining goals, and valuing education, while non-FGS were more likely to receive advice from their parents that specifically addressed academic behaviors in college. These contrasts in parental advice will be explored more in the subsection “Advice for College.”

Another difference emerged on the questionnaires, in students’ descriptions of the challenges they expected to face: FGS expressed more concern about their ability to handle the workload of college, while non-FGS were more likely to focus on non-academic concerns, such as whether they would get enough sleep, “find[a] group to fit in with,” or remember to eat regularly. This difference, too, might be connected to the origins of students’ perceptions, since non-FGS were often more aware initially of the non-academic aspects of college, informed by their parents’ stories about their own college experiences or their parents’ advice about socializing and networking.

These questionnaires did not ask specifically about students’ perceptions of faculty-student interaction, or about the origins of those perceptions. Rather, the questionnaires were an instrument to determine whether students were thinking about faculty-student interaction as part

of their college experience. Overall, it appeared that participants did not consciously consider faculty-student interaction to be a fundamental part of college success, but the questionnaires nonetheless served as a reference point in the interviews, and illustrated students' initial ideas about college.

Students' Perceptions of Faculty

The second and third phases of the study, the individual interviews and focus groups, indicated that, in one important way, the first-generation students' and non-FGS' ideas about professors were similar: Both groups wanted to figure out and meet their professors' expectations. Additionally, although there were some differences in how they approached the topic, students from both groups mentioned and valued the role of respect in their interactions with professors.

The perceptions differed in one central way, however: how the students described and viewed their relationships—current or prospective—with faculty. Students whose parents had college experience were much more likely to talk about professors as if they were or could be equals. Related to that, students' descriptions of their relationships with professors also suggested a stark difference in students' comfort levels with professors. Notably, in this regard, the views from students whose parents had no college experience at all differed from all other students' perspectives on faculty-student interaction. Importantly, FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction changed over the course of their first few months in college, ultimately aligning more closely with non-FGS' perceptions.

The differences in how students regarded their relationships with their professors, and whether students viewed this relationship as one between equals, will be explored in this section;

subsequently, the origins of these differences will be expanded upon in the “Origins of Students’ Perceptions” sections of this chapter.

Meeting Instructors’ Expectations

“I like to be a person that always follows directions in class and that always likes to do what the teacher wants us to do.” (FGS Stephanie)

Students of all backgrounds expressed a willingness to interact with faculty if they felt it was expected of them. This willingness reflects an important student perception about faculty, which is that the student’s job is to fulfill the professor’s expectations. For example, non-FGS Philip talked about how he decided whether to respond to the instructor’s questions or contribute to discussions. He contrasted his current class with other classes he had taken in high school or college, where he was likely to spend class time looking at his phone or his computer: “[Being distracted by my phone during class] doesn’t happen in [this] class, because the professor’s, like, ‘Put your phones away’ at the start of class, so I’m not doing that kind of thing in class.” This example suggests that Philip wishes to meet the professor’s expectations. For Philip, faculty-student interaction meant, at a minimum, paying attention to the teacher, and his comments indicated that he attempted to meet these expectations.

In the interviews, Vashti, also a non-FGS, described her attempts to figure out the professor’s expectations at the beginning of a semester. She described being unsure of how much to participate in her classes on the first day of college, but that on “the second day, I think I had a pretty good sense of what both of my professors expect as far as participation goes.” She then molded her in-class behavior to reflect the professors’ expectations.

Toni, a FGS, similarly based her level of participation on the instructor’s expectations: “If the teacher seems like the kind of person that appreciates that, then I’m more likely to.” FGS

Stephanie also expressed the desire to meet her professors' expectations: "I like to be a person that always follows directions in class and that always likes to do what the teacher wants us to do." Like Vashti, Toni and Stephanie were not talking about grading criteria, but rather about a personal set of expectations from the professor. Though they described themselves differently as students, Philip, Toni, and Vashti (all non-FGS), and Stephanie and Toni (both FGS) each addressed the idea that they based their level of participation on what they determined their professor's expectations to be.

According to the interviews, many students interpreted in-class faculty-student interaction to primarily (or exclusively) mean answering questions in class. Non-FGS Philip, for example, said he would participate "if I'm specifically asked a question." Non-FGS Flaire described, "I don't really jump up and answer, but if he or she asks, I do." A professor asking a question generally expects an answer; thus, a student who identifies answering a professor's question as his main in-class interaction indirectly suggests that he is seeking to meet this professor's expectation.

All of these students, FGS and non-FGS alike, described a desire to participate if they felt that the instructor expected it. This may reflect their high school experiences—that some teachers expect participation and others do not, and that being a successful student requires fulfilling that expectation. Though FGS and non-FGS shared a willingness to meet the instructor's expectations for interaction, this does not indicate the same comfort with faculty, or similar views of the hierarchical relationship between professors and students. The rest of this section will examine the ways in which FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty differently in this regard.

Respect

“I feel like the professors are higher up, and I respect them.” (FGS Emma)

“[T]eachers need to know that they are appreciated, because after all they work so hard for us.” (Non-FGS Vashti)

The idea of interacting with faculty because of a professor’s expectations demonstrates a perspective that the professor is in charge of a hierarchical relationship between professor and students. FGS were more likely to express the belief that professors, being older and in a higher position, ought to be shown respect for those reasons alone. Students of all FGS backgrounds mentioned respect as an important element in the faculty-student relationship, but there were subtle differences in how they talked about it.

Mentioning both teachers and professors, FGS Jessica, who lived in Vietnam until she was ten years old, discussed being surprised by the informality of interactions between students and their instructors in the United States: “[I]n Vietnam, it was like the professor is up there, and you are down here and you don't really interact with them at all. So when I came over here, it was sort of different.” Describing how some college instructors invite their students to call them by their first names, and that students often comply, Jessica concluded: “I kind of, like, avert my head. I'm kind of like, whoa, really? Like, it's a bad thing, because that's not how it was in Vietnam.” To Jessica, being on a first-name basis with a professor was a violation of an established hierarchy, and thus a show of disrespect.

In the focus groups, FGS Emma and Stephanie expressed similar levels of discomfort with the idea of referring to professors by their first names, also equating it with displaying a lack of respect. In response to professors’ asking students to call them by their first names, and her peers’ heeding this request, Emma stated firmly, “I can’t even imagine. I can’t do that,” and

Stephanie concurred, “I can’t do that either.” Like Jessica, both Emma and Stephanie agreed that referring to professors by their first names displayed a lack of respect, with Emma’s explaining that she was unable to call faculty members by their first names because “I feel like the professors are higher up, and I respect them.”

In response to a question about how her background might have affected how she interacts with professors, FGS Mary Lou focused on the hierarchical difference between herself and them: “[W]hen I see adults, it's more of, oh, I need to be polite and respectful.” Like FGS Jessica, Mary Lou focused on the fact that the professors occupied a different level than she did, and that she needed to remain aware of that. This echoes Lareau’s (2012) findings regarding communication between children and adults in working class families, where adults tend to give children directives, and the children are expected to comply.

Philip, a non-FGS whose responses often resembled those of the FGS in the study, also focused on the fact that professors are adults, and that adults should be interacted with in specific ways. He repeatedly mentioned the importance of showing respect for his instructors: “My parents always taught me to be respectful to people older than me.” Their advice to him when he went to college was: “Respect [your] teachers!”

As seen in these responses, it was primarily FGS who focused on the importance of respecting faculty because they were older, and in a superior professional position. However, many non-FGS brought up the topic of respect as well. In contrast to their FGS peers, however, they focused on the actions and/or accomplishments of their instructors as the basis for this respect.

Vashti is a non-FGS who, in addition to being a full-time first-year student, runs a small dance studio with her mother. She reflected in the interview on her own experience as a teacher.

Perhaps because of this experience, she demonstrated an awareness of the point of view of the teacher that other students did not mention. For example, she brought up the topic of respect in her discussion about participating in class:

In the end, teachers are expected to know that students respect you even though we don't show it. They are just expected to know that. Yes, there are students in class who respect your work... I also agree that teachers need to know that they are appreciated, because after all they work so hard for us.

Flaire, a non-FGS whose mother is a teacher, explained to the other students in the focus group the reasons for appreciating professors: "You should listen to and respect what they're showing you because you know they've been where you are and they have all this experience and they are like a guide to show you the right way."

Non-FGS Vashti and Flaire considered professors worthy of respect because of the work they did. This contrasted with the FGS, who were more likely to tie their respect to the societal position that professors occupied. This may reflect that non-FGS did not perceive a significant gap between the social position occupied by the adults in their families and by professors. This idea, which illustrates that non-FGS have familiarity with elements of the field of college, even if they did not have previous experience with college itself, will be examined more in the "Origins of Students' Perceptions" sections of this chapter.

As an interesting contrast to other students' description of respect, non-FGS Rose illustrated the different ways that a FGS and a non-FGS might regard the level of respect that teachers deserve, and the extent to which they deserve this respect on the basis of their work. Rose described an instance in high school in which she questioned a teacher's authority, and the response of her parents, who were both themselves FGS:

I remember when I told my mom about my problems with my chemistry teacher, her response was, “You don’t mess with teachers, they’re the boss, and that’s the end of it.” She was like, “I don’t care if you’re right or wrong, I’m not going to punish you for this, but I also don’t think you should mess with the teacher.” ...[S]o me bringing home the notion that a teacher could actually be wrong was just like appalling. I remember seeing my dad’s face when I was talking about this, and he was, like, “What are you talking about? She can’t be wrong. You must have messed up somehow,” and I was like, “No, I didn’t.”

Non-FGS Rose’s story illustrated a view of how teachers should be regarded that contrasted with Vashti’s and Flaire’s, but that was similar in that it illuminated the view that instructors earn respect on the basis of the work they do, not simply on the basis of being instructors. While Rose’s FGS parents thought that it was disrespectful for Rose to question her teacher at all, Rose felt that this particular teacher had not earned her respect. In this way, Rose presented the idea that teachers, rather than being granted respect on the basis of their professional positions, had to earn respect.

Though Rose did not say that she lacked respect for her teachers, her example illustrated an attitude that a teacher was like any other person in earning respect (or scorn). In a similar vein, Rose approached the relationship between professor and student as a potentially more informal and equal one. This attitude, that a professor or teacher was a prospective equal, was revealed in Rose’s story of expecting teachers to earn respect, in Vashti’s comparison of her own teaching to her professors’ teaching, and in Flaire’s description of the professor as a guide. This attitude was evident in these non-FGS’ comments, such as those by Rose, Vashti, and Flaire, but not in FGS’.

Students' FGS status appeared to influence their views on respect for professors. While both FGS and non-FGS regarded respect as important, non-FGS were able to identify specific aspects of their instructors' work that made them worthy of respect (or, in Rose's case, not worthy). These contrasting views illustrated students' cultural capital—the non-FGS indicated more awareness of what their professors did specifically that deserved respect, while FGS based their respect primarily on age and professional title.

Professors as Equals

“And yelling at them across street? That's something I do.” (Non-FGS Cassie)

“I definitely thought professors would be mean and scary.” (FGS Stephanie)

While both FGS and non-FGS acknowledged the place of respect, non-FGS described their current and future interactions with professors in ways that indicated that they regarded the professors as peers, or as potential peers, rather than as superiors. FGS, particularly those whose parents had no college experience at all, were much more likely to view their professors as superiors.

Students whose parents had college experience were more likely than those students whose parents had not gone to college to indicate that they felt that professors were their equals. Though Rose's story might be interpreted as disrespectful, with most students, the idea of professors as equals did not generally convey an absence of respect. Rather, it illustrated the students' sense that, as Renee said, “I mean, they're just people.” While this attitude was most prevalent among non-FGS—that is, students whose parents had a four-year college degree—it also was mentioned by students, like FGS Renee, whose parents had some college experience, but no college degree. While this study defines FGS as students whose parents did not have a four-year college degree, and compares non-FGS to FGS, the topic of equality between faculty

and students emerged as one in which the different levels of parental college experience might be significant, and the simple FGS/non-FGS dichotomy insufficient to explore or explain students' attitudes and expectations. This significance could be further studied and determined through larger-scale quantitative research.

Non-FGS Rose, who spoke in her interview both about encountering problems with her high school chemistry teacher, and also about having close relationships with other high school teachers, indicated a great deal of comfort with interacting informally with professors in college. She stated confidently, "I personally will, if I see a professor or a teacher in a hallway, I'll wave to them, and say hello, and I'll actually go to your office hours, I'll actually meet you and introduce myself, as a person." She explained her motive for this level of interaction: "It just goes back to the notion that I want to be treated as a person, not just your student." Thus, Rose viewed not only saw her professors as people, but also wanted her professors to view her as more than just a student.

Rose also indicated that she did not view student-faculty relationships as different from other relationships. For example, when asked, "How would you describe your interaction with your professors or instructors outside of class?" Rose responded, "I get friendly real fast. I can't wait, and sometimes I cross a line of friendly, like I'll get too friendly with people." Perhaps significantly, she responded to a question about "professors" with an answer about "people."

Adding to the idea of the professor-student relationship as a mutual one, Rose suggested that it is not only the professor, but also the student, who has to put forth an effort to make the relationship successful. Talking about the role students play in this relationship, she said, "You need to be open enough that you can be approachable to other people, [and] approachable to teachers."

Like Rose, Cassie, also a non-FGS, easily came up with examples of how she interacted with faculty outside of class, before classes began and during the first two weeks of the semester. She offered one specific example of having encountered her professor earlier in the week, and wanting to remind him that she would not be in class on Friday because of a medical appointment: “I saw him walking across the street, and I kind of yelled at him across the street and told him I wasn't going to be here on Friday, and he was like, ‘OK.’ I think I kind of caught him off-guard.” Retelling this story, she laughed at the recollection of his surprise, but throughout the interview, expressed confidence that she had behaved appropriately, adding that she emailed her professors regularly to “get some information...or to tell them something going on in life.” She concluded with, “And yelling at them across street? That's something I do.” Cassie’s description of her out-of-class communication with her professor demonstrated self-assurance that her straight-forward manner towards family or friends was also suitable for interactions with faculty.

Vashti, who teaches dance and whose college-educated parents have been highly involved in her schooling, indicated comfort with both the formal and informal aspects of faculty-student relationships, focusing on the importance of balancing those two:

Yes, they are your friends outside of the classroom, but first and foremost they are your teachers. They are there to educate you and you need to respect and appreciate that. That whole logic has very much helped me in seeing my teachers or interacting with them in very formal and yet informal way outside of class.

Vashti’s comment suggests that she does not see the professor’s roles as teacher or friend to be mutually exclusive.

Kory, a non-FGS who also described numerous in-class and out-of-class interactions with high school teachers, indicated a desire to connect with her instructors, even if some did not seem very approachable. She said that she always looked for some way to bond, even if she and the instructor had almost nothing in common: “But what we do have in common: He’s teaching a course, and I’m taking a course, and I will find something that makes a relationship out of a common topic.” Non-FGS Kory, Vashti and Rose all expressed the desire—even the imperative—to establish relationships with their instructors.

Philip, a non-FGS whose expectations of college often resembled those of FGS (and whose parents, he mentioned in the focus group, “never talked about college” to him), did speak similarly to other non-FGS when describing his high school interactions with teachers and his expectations for interactions with faculty in college. A multi-sport athlete in high school, Philip focused on his coaches when he reflected on his relationships with teachers in high school; though he spoke of them with deference, he also recalled less formal interactions with them. These interactions included encountering one of his coaches regularly during physical therapy outside of school. Philip explained, “[W]e had multiple conversations when we were there, about how he was and how his family was, and how I was. Just pretty much regular conversations.”

After only a couple of weeks of college, Philip found that he was able to have informal interactions with his professors, as well:

With [professor’s name], it’s pretty cool, he’s the first professor I’ve had in college, and I would like to have more professors just like him. Outside of class, I’ve seen him just once or twice, like when I went on the Writing [Center] tour. Outside of class, he’s the same cool, relaxing, happy person that he is in class.

One notable difference between Philip’s description of his interactions and those of the other non-FGS’ is that Philip suggested that he had not expected his college professors to be approachable in the way that his high school coaches were, but that he was pleasantly surprised that at least one was. Non-FGS Rose, Cassie, Kory, and Vashti, meanwhile, described informal interactions that began at the start of the college experience, and that were continuations of the kinds of relationships they had had with other adults, including teachers, in their lives.

When describing their experiences so far with professors, non-FGS were clearly more comfortable than were FGS, and seemed more familiar with the expected habitus. They also displayed certainty that they possessed the cultural capital of knowing how to interact with professors. Although my study design did not include observations of students’ interactions with their professors, the habitus that I, as both a researcher and faculty member, observed generally matched the comfort level that FGS and non-FGS described.

Showing similarity to the non-FGS, students whose parents had some college experience tended to express an interest in the idea of interacting informally with teachers. In the interviews, FGS Renee, Cristina and Toni were most comfortable, while FGS Michael—though less confident—expressed optimism about the possibility. This resemblance to non-FGS may reflect that students whose parents had familiarity with college—though not a four-year degree—had spoken of college in ways that helped these FGS build up cultural capital similar to their non-FGS peers. It is also possible that this subset of FGS were more likely to have family members or a social network of people who had college experience, thus offering them regular interactions with college-educated adults. This in turn may have influenced the habitus of this subgroup of FGS, bringing it closer in this regard to the habitus of the non-FGS.

FGS Renee provides one example of how FGS whose parents had some college experience resembled non-FGS in regard to viewing professors as equals. Echoing some of non-FGS Rose's sentiment, and sounding comfortable in ways that resembled non-FGS Cassie, Renee—a FGS whose mother has a two-year nursing degree—expressed surprise when asked to describe her interactions with faculty: “[T]hey’re just people. So, I mean, outside of class, you don’t have to talk to them about class if they don’t bring it up. I mean, it’s more like saying hi to someone you know.” Identifying an academic benefit to this type of interaction, Renee also explained, “I really enjoy getting to know professors outside of the classroom because, like, if you are on a friendlier level with them, then it’s going to be easier to associate with them in class.”

Cristina—a FGS whose mother had attended college but had not graduated—expressed comfort and interest in having informal interactions with faculty. She illustrated this by describing a recent conversation with one of her professors. This professor’s cat had been ill, which she had told the class about. Cristina described how, the next day, “I asked her about her cat and she said, ‘It didn’t make it.’ And I said, ‘Gosh! That’s horrible!’ I really like those conversations.” Cristina’s conversation illuminated a desire to interact informally with faculty, initiating small talk on topics of interest to the faculty member. In other words, Cristina engaged in conversation with the professor as she would have with any adult or any individual. By pointing out that she really liked such interaction, Cristina indicated awareness that the professor is not simply “any adult,” but at the same time, Cristina possessed a habitus—and confidence in this habitus—that made her comfortable initiating an ordinary conversation with her professor.

This level of comfort was also present in Toni's description of interactions with teachers. Toni, a FGS whose mother had not completed college, recalled her communication with teachers in her earlier school experiences:

It's actually really informal. Generally, teachers... I don't know if it's a 'me' thing, or if that's just the teachers that I've had. I just end up having really good conversations with the teachers. I usually end up having, not necessarily super personal conversations, but not necessarily teacher-student conversations always.

As did both FGS Renee and Cristina elsewhere in their interviews, Toni called upon her experiences with teachers in primary and secondary school to explain what shaped her expectations for interacting with professors in college. Based on these earlier experiences, Toni suggested in her individual interview at the start of her first semester of college that she anticipated having similarly comfortable interactions with university faculty. Two months later, in the focus group, however, she admitted that at the start of the school year, she had been a little less comfortable than she had initially conveyed. She recalling the "horror stories" that she had heard about professors, and that she had initially expected them to be "standoffish," "scary" and "rude." Thus, though Toni possessed a similar habitus to other students whose parents had some college experience, her perception of what professors would be like differed from that of non-FGS. Toni's initial perception of professors is similar to that of other FGS, as will be described later in this section.

Michael, an FGS whose mother had some college experience, did not have as much interaction with high school teachers to refer back to as did FGS Toni, Cristina and Renee. Perhaps because of this, he did not describe the same kinds of expectations for relationships with faculty that these three FGS did. The fact that he did not have close relationships with teachers in

high school may also have inhibited his comfort with professors. This might have meant that he did not possess the elements of the habitus that most of the other FGS whose parents had college experience did. His awareness of not possessing this habitus may in turn have contributed to his greater level of hesitation and uncertainty about these interactions.

Overall, however, Michael's experiences with professors so far in college had been positive. When asked about his interactions in the first few weeks of classes, he first brought up in-class conversations, which had been "very back and forth, especially in discussion classes. So it's very nice like that." Later in the interview, when asked about factors that would make him more likely to interact with faculty in the future, Michael answered hopefully, "If we shared similar interests, especially. If I took a class and the teacher and I really had some interests in common." This answer illustrated a desire to interact with professors as equals, though uncertainty as to whether that would happen. After a pause, Michael added one more personal detail to his answer: "If they were good people, that'd be awesome." Again, like the non-FGS and the FGS whose parents had some college experience, Michael demonstrated an interest in having these personal interactions and a sense that he and a professor might interact as equals. Unlike the other students whose parents had attended college, however, he expressed uncertainty about how or whether that would happen.

In their uncertainty, FGS Michael's answers sounded somewhat similar to those first-generation college students whose parents had no college experience at all, though he expressed more confidence than they did. Mary Lou, Jessica and Emma, all FGS whose parents had no college experience, expressed more doubt about how to interact with faculty than did the rest of the students, both in how they spoke and in the answers they gave.

For example, when Jessica was asked about factors that would make her more likely to interact with faculty, she answered hesitantly, ending her sentence with a questioning intonation: “I feel like it should be OK?” After a pause, she added, “Because, I mean, they’re people, too, so I *feel* like it should be OK to be friends with them.” Beyond that, Jessica did not name any factors that would contribute to her being comfortable interacting with a professor.

Mary Lou, who had mentoring relationships with teachers in high school, gave a more elaborate answer, though doubt was evident in her voice, as well: “I think I see them as people now. So I wouldn't be as afraid if I saw them at Cain's [a local restaurant] or something, to say hi or things like that.” Her use of the phrases “I think...now” and “as afraid” suggest discomfort but a growing ease with informal out-of-class interactions. This contrasted with the ease that students whose parents had college experience usually displayed. Mary Lou further acknowledged her emergent ease with college professors, saying earnestly but with some humor: “So now I know that not all professors are terrifying creatures to run from.”

Emma, who took advanced classes but described them as lecture-, rather than discussion-oriented, did not describe having mentoring relationships with teachers before college, and said, “I don't really talk much to my teachers in high school.” Thinking about interacting outside of class with faculty in college, though, she expressed willingness, however hesitantly: “[I]f they're open and like, you know, ‘How was your day?’ then I'm more open to talk to them.” In the focus group, Emma recalled feeling intimidated by her professors, at the beginning of the school year, which could partly explain her initial reticence to interact with them.

Fear of professors, even among those who indicated some comfort in interacting with professors, was specific to FGS. This reflects a sense of intimidation, and substantiates that these FGS did not see their professors as equals. For example, FGS Renee expressed concerns that her

professors might be “super mean,” while others feared that they would be “overbearing” (Michael), or not “want to be bothered” (Mary Lou) or that getting too close to a professor might be “creepy” (Stephanie). In the focus group, first-generation college students Emma and Stephanie, who had not voiced this concern in the individual interviews, both confirmed that their initial expectation was that professors would be “scary.”

In addition to Stephanie, Emma, and Mary Lou, the other first-generation student in the study whose parents did not have any college experience, Stephanie, described a slightly higher level of comfort (perhaps notably, she was the last student interviewed, and so had more experience taking a small class in college and interacting with her professor at the time of the interview than the other study participants). Stephanie recalled seeing her professor at a campus establishment and saying hi, but did not bring up any other possible types of interactions.

All participants were asked the same open-ended questions about interacting with faculty. Many students, like Stephanie, considered a very informal exchange that might take place if one were to run into a professor in public. Some interpreted the question to be about future friendships with faculty members. Other students’ answers focused on office hours or academic discussions outside of class. Though no pattern emerged with students’ interpretations of this question, almost without exception, non-FGS expressed more willingness and comfort with any type of interaction and often described an intention to initiate interactions. Students whose parents had less college experience were likely to identify only one kind of out-of-class interaction and to express more doubts and discomfort with any type of interaction.

Students whose parents had no college experience were less likely, in the initial interviews, to expect interactions or plan to seek them out. This may illustrate non-FGS’ greater awareness of what to expect from college, which contrasts with FGS’ relative unfamiliarity with

the field of college, and their related uncertainty about the habitus expected in this environment. Again, in this regard, FGS whose parents had some college experience often more resembled their non-FGS peers, while FGS whose parents had no college experience at all expressed views that contrasted starkly with the perceptions of their peers whose parents had college experience.

These differing expectations and reported levels of comfort may also illustrate one aspect of Lareau's (2012) study on working class and middle class families, which indicates that in middle class families (where the adults, employing Lareau's sociocultural description of class, were very likely to be college-educated), children were allowed and expected to participate in reciprocal conversations with adults. The non-FGS in my study displayed a comfort with the idea of conversing with faculty that was higher than it was for FGS; this may reflect that non-FGS have more experience in the practice of talking with adults as equals. In addition to the aspects of habitus that students learn from these early interactions, the experiences also illustrate how some students acquire cultural capital that informs their perceptions and expectations of professors. For students—here, primarily non-FGS—who may have had more experience interacting with adults as equals, their cultural capital helps them navigate those interactions with a greater level of confidence and comfort.

One additional detail that indicated a difference between FGS and non-FGS, and that may have illustrated non-FGS' greater comfort with faculty, emerged very early in the study. As described in the "Participants" section, although all invited students agreed to complete a questionnaire, FGS were less likely than non-FGS to agree to be contacted for a follow-up interview; further, of those students who did agree to be interviewed, FGS were less likely and slower to respond to my requests to set up an interview: Overall, non-FGS answered my email invitation promptly, while FGS responded a few days later, or after my second emailed invitation

or text message. This may reflect an overall greater initial willingness by non-FGS to interact with college faculty. This difference faded by the time of the focus groups, which took place midway through the students' second semester, a change that may reflect the comfort that FGS developed as they became more familiar with the university environment.

FGS' Emerging Comfort

“I need to be polite and respectful.” (FGS Mary Lou, describing her attitude towards professors at the start of her first semester)

“It’s hard to respect [a professor] and to take them seriously when they treat you like crap.” (Mary Lou, after three months of college)

In this study, first-generation college students, particularly those whose parents had no college experience, were initially more reticent to interact with professors than were non-FGS, and expressed more fear of them. As discussed earlier in this section, this hesitance might be explained by the fact that FGS had less familiarity with the field of college or the habitus expected in this field, and that this unfamiliarity inhibited them. If this interpretation is correct, then, as FGS gained familiarity with the field, presumably their comfort would increase and they would be less inhibited. Meanwhile, the comfort of non-FGS, who already had some familiarity with the field—or with similar fields—at the start of their college careers, and who already were comfortable with the expected habitus, would not be as likely to change.

Students' responses during the focus groups, which were held during their second semester of college, approximately three months after the individual interviews, indicated that this was indeed the case. Non-FGS, who had more comfort with the field of college when they began, were unlikely to report that their perceptions of or ease with professors had changed significantly over the course of their first months there; in contrast, FGS—particularly those

whose parents had no college experience—reported significant changes in their perceptions since their first day of classes.

Among FGS whose parents had no college experience, Mary Lou’s attitude and rhetoric about faculty changed the most. When she first started college, she said, “I thought all my professors were just going to be mean and rude and really scary.” After a semester of college, she saw things differently. As she reported in the focus group: “Now I realize that most are just like regular people.” In high school, Mary Lou had developed close relationships with some of her teachers and, though she initially had not expected that the same would happen in college, she bonded with one of her professors from the summer term. In fact—contrary to her expectations—she started referring to him by his first name. When this professor’s course came up in the focus group, Mary Lou volunteered, “I’m still friends with [professor’s first name].” She then explained that the professor often came to visit her at work, since she now had a work-study job in the main office of his department. Mary Lou credited her experience with the summer program, which allowed her to take a discussion-oriented college class with only a handful of students in it, for the comfort she now felt with professors.

Throughout the focus group session, in contrast to the individual interview, Mary Lou described a substantially increased comfort with faculty and an attitude that was much more similar to non-FGS’ ideas that professors were like equals. This view came out indirectly when Mary Lou described one of her professors this semester, who was “really rude to all of the students,” and added, “It’s hard to respect someone and take them seriously when they treat you like crap.” This assessment of her professor contrasted with the deferential way she discussed faculty in the individual interviews, and illustrated a new view for Mary Lou that faculty could be evaluated and regarded—positively or negatively—based on their personalities and not just on

their professional status. This changed perspective resembled non-FGS Rose's story of, and attitude towards, her high school chemistry teacher.

FGS Stephanie's and Emma's attitudes evolved similarly, though not as dramatically. Emma recognized that her initial idea that professors would not want to help was "completely wrong, because most of the professors here care about you understanding stuff and they are willing to help you." She later illustrated the professors' willingness to help by describing their openness to questions and to student consultations during office hours, both interactions in which she seemed willing to engage. In the focus group, Stephanie agreed with Emma's comment about professors caring: "They really do want you to excel here... Like, in one of my classes, there are, like, 300 students, but the professor really wants you to learn the material and to participate." These attitudes suggest that, over the course of the first semester of college, these FGS have become more familiar with the new field of the university, and have developed a sense of their professors that more resembles their non-FGS peers', and that may in fact more accurately reflect the professors' expectations.

The change in familiarity with the field could not have automatically resulted in a change of habitus. Mary Lou, Stephanie, and Emma all demonstrated that they had become more comfortable with their new field and that they had gained knowledge about what professors expected in college, and how they treated students. However, Stephanie and Emma's habitus did not seem to have changed significantly, as they still described their interactions with professors as formal and deferential. Mary Lou, in contrast, seemed to more display a habitus very similar to that of her non-FGS peers.

While it is unlikely that habitus, which tends to be stable and slow to evolve, would change so quickly, there are a few possible explanations for the appearance of such a change. An

individual is likely to feel uncomfortable or out of their element when their habitus does not fit with the expected habitus of a field. Similarly, an individual would be uncomfortable in an unfamiliar field, where he/she was unsure of the expected habitus. In the individual interview, Mary Lou, who had no prior college experience and whose parent had not attended college, expressed uncertainty about what to expect from college; in other words, she was aware of being unfamiliar with this new field. Notably, though, Mary Lou had had very close relationships with teachers throughout her primary and secondary schooling. It is possible that, once Mary Lou had had some college experience, she discovered that college was a field not entirely different from high school, where she had felt very comfortable.

In fact, contrary to her expectations, Mary Lou's experiences in college so far had resembled her experiences in high school. In both cases, she had a comfortable rapport with her instructors. In conjunction with this, as a result of working at the front desk in a departmental office at the university, Mary Lou had frequent, sustained interactions with faculty and staff, which may have intensified the speed of her adjustment to college. Thus, while Mary Lou's habitus was unlikely to have shifted as dramatically in the first three months of college as she suggested, she may indeed have displayed a change in habitus or a change in her description of her habitus. It may have been the case that Mary Lou had not accurately represented her habitus in the initial interview, perhaps because she had been unsure of how well this habitus would fit with this new field, which was completely new to her. Subsequently, having realized that her habitus was not in fact as different as she had anticipated, however, she might have been more likely to describe her "authentic" habitus in the focus groups.

Another possible explanation for Mary Lou's reported change in habitus is that she was in a focus group in which she was the only FGS. Being in this environment may have

unconsciously influenced her answers. In other words, her descriptions of her habitus might not have exactly matched the actual habitus that she displayed. Finally, of course, the change could be a result of other circumstances or of Mary Lou's personality. Because I did not actively observe students' habitus in their interactions with professors, I can only speculate on the causes of Mary Lou's self-reported changes; however, it is clear that, regardless of the explanation for the apparent change in habitus, Mary Lou's cultural capital did in fact change, as she displayed far more awareness of the expectations for comportment and comfort.

In contrast to this subgroup of FGS whose parents had no college experience (comprised of Mary Lou, Stephanie, Emma, and Jessica) and who had initially expected professors to be hard to connect with, most students whose parents did have college experience said in the focus groups that their initial expectations of faculty-student interaction had been fairly accurate. Toni and LG, for example, agreed with one another that, although Toni might have anticipated that professors would be a little more "chill," and LG had thought they would be a little less so, their perceptions coming into college had been mostly correct.

Interestingly, two of the non-FGS said in a focus group that their perceptions about faculty-student interaction had been accurate, but also expressed some disappointment that their relationships with their professors were not as friendly as they had expected. Flaire, for example, found that the close contact between students and faculty in the honors program had not created an effortless relationship. In fact, he said, he felt that such a familiar relationship "puts so much pressure on you" to excel in class, and that he would prefer an informal but less stressful relationship.

As she had expected, non-FGS Cassie was friendly with some of her professors, including one with whom, prior to the focus group, she had "just had a long, drawn-out

conversation about life and what not.” Despite this, Cassie found that some professors were less approachable than she had anticipated, and that “it’s harder to get relationships or connections with lecture professors.” She expressed disappointment that one of her professors was unsympathetic to the students. She gave an example of how this personally affected her, which contrasted with her first-semester story of yelling to her professor across the street: “I had a migraine yesterday and thought about emailing the professor but knew she would respond, like, ‘You should’ve thought about not getting migraines before you came to college.’ That’s the kind of professor we have for math.”

Non-FGS Cassie’s expectation had been that professors would like her, since her high school experience was that “all of my teachers have loved me” and she initially described a perception that faculty-student interaction would always be informal and equal; her experience so far had been mixed, including some professors with whom she interacted easily, and other professors with whom she felt disconnected. Although Cassie had expressed a great deal of initial comfort with the field of the university, and had a lot of confidence in her habitus in this environment, the reality of college had turned out to not quite reflect her expectations.

As illustrated in this section, after a little over a semester of college, most of the non-FGS found that their initial perceptions had been accurate, though Cassie and Flaire indicated some disappointment that they were not always as simple or effortless as they had anticipated. Contrasting with these minor changes in perceptions, the subset of FGS whose parents had no college experience exhibited significant evolution in their perceptions of and self-reported comfort with professors, both in and out of class. This suggests that, although none of the non-FGS in the study mentioned having spent time on college campuses before coming to Urban State University, non-FGS felt comfortable with the new field of college, which may have felt

similar to other fields they had inhabited. While non-FGS' expectations may not have exactly matched their experiences once they were in college, the experience was sufficiently similar to their expectations, and neither their habitus nor their comfort changed very much. In contrast, FGS were far less familiar with the field or sure of the expected habitus of a university student, and thus initially expressed more reticence to interact; however, within a fairly short time, the FGS gained familiarity with the field and indicated increased comfort navigating it. While some FGS reported a change in their own comfort, it is unlikely that an actual change in habitus could take place over the course of a few months. Nonetheless, the change in FGS' cultural capital and the increase in the comfort levels suggest that their habitus may be changing at a greater rate than it is for non-FGS.

Origins of Students' Perceptions: Introduction

As described in the previous sections, there were similarities in FGS' and non-FGS' intention to meet professors' expectations; however, there were significant differences in their perceptions of faculty, and these differences may relate to the origins of students' perceptions. In order to better understand the origin of students' perceptions about faculty-student interaction, it is helpful to consider the origins of their perceptions about college itself as well, since the advice and information that participants received—directly and indirectly—about college in general appears to have also influenced their perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

In some ways, all students in the study had access to the same potential sources of information about college, including older peers, teachers and counselors, internet resources, and other media. It is possible to make this statement for two reasons. First, because this study included students of different first-generation statuses who were high-achieving, in advanced

classes, in similar k-12 school systems, and now at the same university, these sources of information were likely similar for them. Second, the self-reported family income of students in the study did not correlate strongly with parental education level, so students' access to monetary resources could be considered similar. As will be examined here, however, FGS and non-FGS did not access, internalize, or apply these common sources of information in the same ways.

Although students of different first-generation college statuses had access to many of the same sources of information, as described above, non-FGS had one very different—and influential—source of information about college: their parents. A parent who went to college would have first-hand experience to draw upon when talking with his/her child about college, while a parent who did not go to college would not have that first-hand experience. In the interviews, this difference was evident: The FGS whose parents had no college experience did not discuss getting any of their perceptions of college from their parents, while students whose parents graduated from college reported learning a lot about college from their parents. In between these two groups, students whose parents had only some college experience (but not a four-year degree), meanwhile, got varying degrees of information and advice from their parents about college, though all reported getting something. Thus, a parent's college experience—conveyed through advice to students and conversations about college—contributed to a student's cultural capital upon entering college.

In this study, the origins of FGS' perceptions of college were strikingly different than the origins of non-FGS' perceptions of college. Though participants did not frequently identify the origins of their perceptions of faculty-student interaction specifically, the origins of their perceptions of faculty-student interaction seemed likely to overlap with the origins of their perceptions of college. While there were some differences in the perceptions that students had of

faculty-student interaction that corresponded with first-generation status, the origins of FGS' perceptions often reflected their ability to acquire from different sources potentially beneficial cultural capital that they did not get from family. In fact, many FGS demonstrated the ability to use their social capital in order to access the cultural capital that they needed for success in college. This social capital included networks formed through their parents' customers in a family business, teachers at school, and older peers. Additionally, some factors unrelated to parental education level appeared to moderate the lack of cultural capital about college, a lack that that might hurt FGS in college. These circumstances included their own experiences in school, parenting styles, and characteristics of their hometowns.

Although the information that FGS obtained about college from other sources often helped them form expectations of college that turned out to be accurate, at other times, this acquired capital may not have been as multifaceted for FGS, and sometimes may have been less accurate. For example, Mary Lou's initial expectations of professors were primarily negative, based largely on her high school teachers' stories of apathetic or angry professors. Movies and TV shows influenced many FGS', including Mary Lou's, perceptions in ways that they later determined were inaccurate. These perceptions of professors were simplified and more one-dimensional than the non-FGS' perceptions tended to be. It is also important to note that the students in this study were those who successfully made it to college. Consequently, it is not surprising that they had been able to access applicable cultural capital somewhere.

The origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction sometimes related directly to the origins of their perceptions of college, but additional influences emerged that shaped students' perceptions of these interactions. Some of these elements— aspects of parenting styles and background— did not seem to depend on first-generation status, while others— advice

and past experience with teachers, for example—did seem to be directly affected by first-generation status.

Origins of Students' Perceptions: The Role of Parental Education Level

In certain ways, first-generation status directly influenced students' perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction. The advice students received about these topics, and the expectations that they developed as a result, seemed to correlate strongly with students' first-generation status. Additionally, for some students, parental education seemed to be significant in helping them become more familiar with teachers and with other educators, a comfort that may have translated into ease with college professors.

Advice for College

“Pretty much the advice I’ve gotten through high school, and really all the advice before then, was building up to college.” (Non-FGS Philip)

“[My parents] don’t understand what it’s like, so they can’t really give me advice on what to do.” (FGS Emma)

In interviews, parents' influence on their children's perceptions of college and faculty-student interaction emerged. Most often, this was reported in the context of parents' advice for their children regarding college. There were large differences in the types of advice that students reported getting from their parents, which correlated strongly with first-generation college status. These differences reflected parents' different kinds of cultural capital; generally, students described parents' imparting the advice that the parents felt was important, or that the parents felt most equipped to pass on to their children.

For example, students whose parents did not have any college experience reported getting advice about life, as well as general advice about the importance of remembering goals and getting an education. This advice reflects cultural capital and practical knowledge that an individual without a college degree might have learned through work and life. Students whose parents had some college, but no four-year degree, tended to get life advice or reminders about the importance of being serious about one's studies. Again, such advice could reflect the life experience—part of the cultural capital, along with practical knowledge—of individuals who had gone to college but did not complete a four-year degree. Students whose parents had college degrees, in contrast, often reported getting very specific academic advice, as well as recommendations about job opportunities, networking, and clubs. Such advice demonstrates the very applicable cultural capital and practical knowledge about college of this group of parents, who had gone through a similar experience to that on which their children were now embarking. There were students in each group who reported that their parents had no advice for them about college, but students whose parents had no college experience were disproportionately likely to say that their parents had not given them any advice.

Mary Lou was one of the FGS who did not receive any advice from her parents. She directly linked her mother's lack of experience with college to the absence of advice from her: "My mother never went to college, and I was mainly raised with her, and so I usually just heard things about college from my teachers."

Like Mary Lou, FGS Jessica's parents did not have any college experience, and Jessica pointed out her parents' lack of involvement in her preparation for college. As she explained, they did not offer any advice, and in fact, "They didn't even know what college I got into, until I

started this program, and I was like, oh yeah, I'm going to VCU. They're not too involved with my school stuff."

First-generation college student Emma described her parents as being more interested in her college plans, reporting that "they pushed me really hard to get to university," but their advice was limited: "They just told me to work hard, and that they know that I'm going to do it, so they don't worry much. Because they've never really been in a college setting, so they don't understand what it's like, so they can't really give me advice on what to do." The only other advice that Emma recalled receiving from her parents centered on the importance of going to college, rather than on what to do once there: "You don't want to end up like us. You want to, like, work hard and get a good job so that you don't have to, like, be involved in manual labor every day."

FGS Jessica, Mary Lou, and Emma all identified their parents' lack of college experience as the reasons that they did not receive concrete advice about college from them. Stephanie, whose parents similarly had no experience with college, received general advice from her mother and father. Throughout the interview, Stephanie recalled that they reminded her often, "You're here for a reason." This advice may reflect the parents' aspirations for their daughter to go to college, but it does not reflect first-hand knowledge of the experience.

During the focus group, Emma said that her mother had been able to advise her on emotional topics, but not on anything academic. Similarly, reflecting on her parents' advice regarding school, Stephanie concluded that it was always about the "emotional and mental aspects" of life, "on growing up and being mature and doing the right thing," but that when it came to academics, "that's all me." This illustrates one way in which a first-generation college student's parents passed on valuable social capital, in the form of emotional advice and support,

but not necessarily the capital directly relating to academics that many non-FGS received. While FGS' parents did offer this social capital, they did not have the same practical knowledge, or the cultural capital relating to college, to offer their children.

Stephanie's parents, however, did give her concrete advice about college, which was unusual among FGS. As Stephanie described, "My parents are always telling me, always ask questions, or always talk to the teachers. Because if you don't talk to the teacher, you'll never know. If you don't ask questions, then you'll never know." Stephanie's parents were very involved in her education in primary and secondary school, and this advice may reflect the cultural capital that they themselves acquired in those settings.

Students whose parents had some college experience, but not a four-year degree, reported very different advice from their parents than the advice received from parents who had no college experience. This advice sometimes involved life skills—reflecting an awareness of, as well as possession of, cultural capital necessary for success in the non-academic aspects of college. Toni, for instance, whose mother did not complete college, got practical advice that reflected her mother's familiarity with some of the central non-academic elements of college:

[L]ots of little things, mostly social things, though. Like don't piss off your roommate. Be really aware of keeping your stuff in your area, don't have a bunch of people in the room if she's not comfortable with it. Lots of roommate advice. Things like, you know, cleanly things, little tips about how to do my laundry and stuff like that.

While this advice might not be academic, it does reflect an awareness on the mother's part of other aspects of college that are important for success in that setting. This awareness is part of the cultural capital that Toni, and other students whose parents had experience with college, grew up around.

Other times, FGS received advice from a parent who did not graduate from a four-year college that may have reflected that parent's hope that his/her child would complete college. Renee's and Cristina's parents' advice fits this pattern. Renee, whose mother went back to college later in life for a two-year degree, said, "My mom's been telling me stuff about college since like third grade." Cristina went into more detail: "[My dad] was always telling me to be serious about school and get a good education. Neither of my parents have a college degree. My mom did a little bit of college but he didn't do any. So he really focused on learning and knowledge." These examples both reflect parents' knowledge about the value of higher education, which may be partly informed by their limited—but still existent and influential—experiences with college.

Among the non-FGS, LeeAnne's parents' background may have been closest to those of FGS Cristina, Renee, and Toni: LeeAnne remembered when her mother decided to enroll in the local community college to study nursing, and though her father had a four-year degree, LeeAnne pointed out that his educational background was very different from the one she was embarking on: Her dad had gone to a small, local Bible college and lived at home, and, as LeeAnne described, "I don't really necessarily think he got the college experience I'm getting, which is like the typical college experience." She was also aware that he had struggled academically, repeatedly getting on academic probation and having to petition to remain at the school. In this context, the two pieces of advice that LeeAnne reported receiving from him made sense: "Don't get on academic probation" and "[G]raduate in four years."

The limited advice—and the advice not to follow in a parent's footsteps—that LeeAnne received contrasted strongly with the more extensive advice that most non-FGS received from

their parents. Philip, for example, began by saying “I didn’t really get any advice for college,” then recited an extensive list of recommendations from his parents:

Pretty much the advice I’ve gotten through high school, and really all the advice before then, was building up to college. Oh wait, actually, I got one piece of advice. The one advice was don’t party too much, not do excess fun things, to actually get my work done in time. But other than that, I didn’t get much advice. Oh, also, respect teachers, have fun when you can, make sure to study.

Many non-FGS, like Philip, spoke with some pride about how their parents did not have much influence on their perceptions or on their choices in or about college, but they did recall and describe their parents’ words about college with precision. For example, Vashti described a conversation with her father about college majors: “[W]e had a little career future chat, and he says, ‘[Vashti], I only see three options for you for what you’re interested in doing. Either you’re going to be a surgeon, a dentist or a lawyer.’” Retelling the conversation, Vashti agreed with her father’s assessment and reasons, and explained how and why she followed his advice, then concluded her story by stating, “So [my choice of major] comes a little from my parents, but career-wise I had my own say in choosing what I want to do in the future.” Philip’s and Vashti’s understandings illustrate how unaware individuals can be of others’, including parents’, influence. Philip and Vashti demonstrate that even overt advice might not be recognized as influential (even as each student reported following their parents’ advice); in this manner, embodied cultural capital, which is transmitted from one generation to the next through socialization, might go unrecognized by its recipients. Thus, when participants were asked about their parents’ influence on their perceptions of college or of faculty-student interaction, they might not have been able to accurately, completely, or directly identify these influences.

Similarly to non-FGS Vashti and Philip, non-FGS Kory stated more than once in her interview that her parents did not have much influence on her college decisions or plans. However, she volunteered a number of examples of ways that they advised her, and each of these pieces of advice was reflected in choices she made about or in college. For example, her parents told her that “networking is everything,” a sentiment that Kory independently reiterated elsewhere in the interview. Additionally, she went to her parents when she was trying to decide which college to attend, and they helped her make that choice. This story of receiving and taking advice contrasts with Kory’s statement in the interview, “I think the only advice my mom’s given me is, ‘You’re old enough now to make your own decisions, and you have to understand that you have a greater reputation than yourself.’”

When students were asked in the individual interviews about the origins of their perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction, most—FGS and non-FGS alike—described advice that they had received from their parents. Less frequently, students described what they knew about their parents’ experiences in college, and how that influenced them. This advice and information often reflected the parents’ cultural capital, alongside their practical knowledge. Students did not directly mention the many ways in which their parents may have passed on cultural capital about college in more subtle ways, such as through the people they interacted with, the types of cultural events they attended, or the parents’ comfort with the college environment. All these factors are most likely present and relevant, but are subtle, and were not identified by participants.

Like Kory, non-FGS Cassie clearly illustrated the implicit nature of cultural capital and students’ obliviousness to the cultural capital passed down from their parents. In this instance, Cassie told the focus group that she was not “directly or indirectly influenced” by her parents,

explaining that her mom had majored in business, while her dad worked at a post office, but that she, in contrast, was planning to major in chemistry. While Cassie reported this as proof that she had not been impacted by her parents' experience, in reality it may rather have illustrated that students could be unaware of the myriad ways that their upbringing was influenced by their parents' college experience, instead believing that "influence" meant simply parents' determining their child's major. The way that these non-FGS were unaware of the fact that they received cultural capital from their parents reflects a central conceptual aspect of cultural capital itself: Cultural capital is "passed on" from generation to generation (Webb et al., 2008, p. 111) or "passed down by the family" (Dumais, 2002, p. 44), rather than explicitly taught. Thus an individual would be unlikely to recognize that he or she had received this capital from a parent; instead, the individual would be likely to see the capital as something he or she innately knew or had learned through experience.

In contrast to many of the non-FGS who did not recognize their parents' impact on their perceptions of college, Flaire acknowledged it frankly: "My parents have influence me a lot how I perceive college." He experienced this directly, with his parents' sometimes conflicting advice about how to fully embrace college life. According to Flaire, his mother was a "nerd" and emphasized how wonderful the academic side of college was, while his father was a "party animal," who told him about his exploits there. Describing his parents' influence on his views of college, Flaire recalled, "When I was little, I didn't know college was a place where you go to study. I thought college was just this really fun place that you go." Eventually, he hinted, he began to understand his mother's experiences at university, and now thinks he is a mix of the two (a proclamation that the other members of the focus group concurred with). This recollection reflected the extent to which his parents' experiences had shaped his expectations.

Other non-FGS described specific advice about both the academic and social realms of college, advice that reflected their parents' knowledge of what to expect in college. This advice ranged from the importance of not joining too many clubs and of being "passionate about your education" (Rose) to sleeping, making friends and not "put[ting] your drink down at parties" (Cassie) to the specific instructions, "Work hard, don't wait until the last minute to do stuff, plan, pay attention in class, take notes" (LG).

All of these examples illustrate useful information that non-FGS received from their parents about college. Although some FGS received advice as well, it was rarely specific or academic, and contrasted strongly with the advice that non-FGS received. For the most part, students identified advice as the only parental influence on their perceptions of college; they generally did not suggest other ways in which their parents had affected or shaped their perceptions, such as through modeling or comfort in a certain situation. Non-FGS often seemed to take pride in having made their own choices without relying on parental advice or other influence, but this was contradicted by their descriptions of their parents' actual influence and involvement. Regardless of whether students chose to follow their parents' advice about or path in college, the advice and modeling themselves both reflected and transmitted an awareness of the college experience, a type of cultural capital that FGS were less likely to receive from their parents. It is clear that parents' advice, which dovetailed with their cultural capital regarding college, was transmitted to their children and in many ways shaped those children's perceptions of college. Because non-FGS' parents had much more advice to offer, their influence appeared to be more substantial in shaping their children's perceptions than was the more limited advice from FGS' parents.

Parental Advice about Interacting with Faculty

“Build that relationship!” (Non-FGS LG)

In addition to advice about college in general, some parents gave specific advice about interacting with faculty. Non-FGS LG, for example, explained his understanding of faculty-student interaction in the interview: “You have to talk to your professors one-on-one, if you have questions, you have to go see them. My parents were actually pretty open about that.” In the focus group, he speculated that, if a student’s parents went to college, “their parents would give advice like, ‘Get to know your professors. Get on their good side. Build that relationship.’” LG recognized that he himself had benefited from this kind of advice.

Vashti’s parents were even more detailed in their advice about her in-class behavior, which was related to her outward display of respect for the teacher and interest in the subject: “They told me, ‘[I]f you are a good student, no matter what you do, you will go to the class 30 minutes early, sit right in the front row, on the first bench where your professor can stare at you for the entire class. That is what you need to do at college. If you don’t do this, we don’t know what else you will do at college.’” Although many students reported getting advice about college, non-FGS Vashti and LG were the only students interviewed whose parents had specific advice about how they should interact with instructors.

Family Connections with Teachers

“[M]y parents were friends with [the principal].” (Non-FGS Kory)

Along with experiences with their own teachers while in high school, many of the non-FGS had an additional reason to feel comfortable with teachers: familiarity with teachers through family and family friends. The simplest example of this was Flaire, whose mother was herself a high school teacher. Interestingly, Flaire did not identify his mother’s profession as a significant

factor in his comfort with teachers or professors; however, among interview participants, Flaire displayed a high level of comfort with the idea of interacting with faculty.

Kory also did not identify her familiarity with teachers as a reason for her comfort with them, but her personal experience with teachers outside of her formal schooling came up in the interviews and was clearly influential. When she was visiting her family's native country of India on vacation, she was simultaneously working on her senior project about educational systems in other countries, and contacted the principal of a school there "because my parents were friends with him." This experience demonstrated not only the social capital to which Kory had access, but also the cultural capital that was derived from that network. In this particular case, the cultural capital translated to comfort with teachers, or even high-level administrators, in a school. Again, these suggest a habitus and comfort in a field that can be transferred to the college setting. To a student, interacting with a college professor might not seem very different, or call upon a different set of skills or habits, than talking to a high school principal.

Indeed, students' comfort with high school teachers seemed to correlate strongly with their comfort with college faculty. Like Kory and Flaire, non-FGS were more likely to have had personal relationships with teachers, who were more likely to be family members or friends. In the interviews, they indicated that these relationships, and the interactions resulting from them, were not unlike their interactions with college professors.

Some non-FGS also described their parents' interactions with teachers in school, which is a way that parents modeled the habitus required to successfully carry out these interactions, and the cultural capital to know that this is useful or necessary. Vashti's father, for example, accompanied her to the appointment with the guidance counselor at which they discussed her

college major, and Cassie told of her father going to talk with her school teachers when problems arose.

Although it does not require a college degree to interact with teachers, it may not be coincidence that only non-FGS described their parents' interacting with teachers or counselors; rather, a college education may impart the awareness—or the cultural capital—that precipitates and facilitates such interactions. In addition to the informal interactions with teachers within one's one social circle, as was the case with Flaire and Kory, a child with college-educated parents would be more likely to come into contact with other college-educated adults, including possibly teachers, within the family or social sphere.

Supplemental Education

Non-FGS also identified supplemental education—camps and sports—as places where they learned about how to interact with adults. In each case, the student brought up the supplemental education as an example of something the parents initiated and pushed. This supplemental education might be useful for both FGS and non-FGS, but it emerged in interviews only with non-FGS.

Non-FGS Kory, for example, spent much of her time in summer camps, where she admired the camp counselors and their skills interacting with others, and which she credits with teaching her leadership. According to Kory, her parents enrolled her and her sister in many camps and after-school activities, partly because they both worked full time, but also in an attempt to expose them to as many new skills and experiences as possible.

Philip's parents were more focused on a specific kind of extracurricular activity: They strongly encouraged him to participate in sports, which he believed taught him about interacting with adults: “So, from my parents pushing me into different things like that, it's taught me a lot

of things: How to act, how not to act, what to do, what not to do.” In both these cases, the extracurricular activities gave these students a chance to learn more about interacting with adults, which in turn likely impacted the ways in which they interacted with professors, and the comfort they felt with those interactions.

As mentioned previously, supplemental educational experiences were mentioned only by non-FGS in this study; this might be because they were more likely to participate in them. If this is the case, it could be a consequence of college-educated parents being more aware of the value of such programs for a child’s personal growth and/or for building up resumes for college. The difference in FGS’ and non-FGS’ participation in camps and sports might typically be explained by a difference in socioeconomic status between these two groups, since extracurricular activities can be expensive. That explanation would not suffice here, however, as participants in this study did not report significant differences in family income based on FGS status.

This disparity in extracurricular participation corresponds with one element of Lareau’s (2011) study on families: College-educated parents, as part of the parenting style that Lareau (2011) describes as “concerted cultivation,” are significantly more likely to enroll their children in after-school activities and summer camps. Though these more educated parents may not do so with faculty-student interaction in mind, they do recognize broad benefits—including as preparation for college—of such extracurricular experiences, just as did Kory’s and Philip’s parents. Lareau’s (2011) finding that the children of college-educated parents are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities is corroborated by the National Center for Educational Statistics’ Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2002-03 study, which found that the frequency of a student’s participation in non-school activities correlated with parental education level (Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2003, p. 37). To reiterate, parents’ motivation in enrolling

their children in these extracurricular activities cannot be determined by my study (or by this survey), but overall non-FGS are more likely to participate in such activities, and in my study, the students who discussed extracurricular activities—all non-FGS—believed that their participation in them contributed to their comfort with adults. This, in turn, is likely to have had an impact on their perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

Origins of Students' Perceptions: FGS' Accessing Additional Resources

The previous section described ways in which parents' education level influenced students' perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction. This section looks at ways that students acquired cultural capital through other means, not specifically related to parental education level. Although this cultural capital might not be exactly the same as the cultural capital that non-FGS bring to college, it is relevant and useful for college success, and shaped FGS' perceptions. In many cases, students used their social capital to acquire cultural capital. In the interviews, this practice emerged as one which FGS regularly implemented; FGS were not the only group to use their social capital this way, however: Non-FGS whose parents did not go to college in the United States similarly sought and acquired information about college through their social networks, in ways that resembled FGS' practice.

Accessing a Network

“If I couldn't figure it out, [I could] find someone who could help.” (FGS Stephanie)

Some students' perceptions of college were influenced by people in their social network, including older peers and adults who had college experience. Soliciting advice from knowledgeable, experienced individuals reflects an ability to use one's social capital to obtain specific information that might stand in place of the cultural capital that the typical non-FGS

brings to college. The interviews revealed two groups of students who undertook this: FGS, and non-FGS whose parents did not attend college in the U.S. In both cases, these students were able to acquire information that non-FGS whose parents' college experience took place in the U.S. might have received directly or indirectly from their parents. These students accessed social networks that included their older peers, as well as individuals whom they knew through their families' businesses.

Toni, a FGS who took a year off between high school and college, said that this gap year changed her perceptions of college. During that year, she saw her friends experience—and often struggle with—college, and she talked with them about it, which “changed my opinion from, I think my senior year I was more so looking forward to the social aspects, and it kind of just, well...it changed my perception about how hard things were going to be, prepared me more for dealing with that.” Thus, though Toni might not have discussed college with these friends with the specific goal of learning more about college, having a group of friends who were experiencing college life before Toni did helped her develop a more accurate sense of what to expect from college.

Stephanie, a FGS who took the practical advice she received from her teachers and the life advice she got from her parents very seriously, also sought out advice from older peers during her first week on campus. During freshman orientation, Stephanie met a second-year student who was representing a club that Stephanie was interested in. Stephanie directly asked for this student's advice about college:

I asked her what I should expect from college or what I should expect from [Urban State University], being that she just finished her first year. And she just told me definitely to just focus on my goals, and what I have to do, and also taking advantage of the library,

and the people around me. And I definitely thought that was a really good piece of advice because that's something you can take with you anywhere that you go.

Stephanie also requested information and advice from the customers who came into her mother's business. Many of these customers were current university students or were recent graduates. Others were college-educated professionals. As Stephanie described in the focus group, "I would always ask them so many questions when they came into my mom's business... So I could get a feel for what [college] would be like, so I could do better." Stephanie took part in discussions about college with older peers more intentionally than did Toni, as Stephanie's primary goal in the interactions was to learn more about college. The end results, however, were similar: Both of these first-generation college students were able to learn more about college by accessing their social networks.

Similar to Stephanie, Emma, a FGS whose mother owned and worked in a local restaurant, recalled how she learned information about college from the customers there. A pre-med student, Emma gave a specific example in the focus group of using this social network: "One of [my mother's] customers is an anesthesiologist, and that helps me a lot because he gave advice on what schools I could go to and he told me about shadowing," a very useful practical experience for admission to medical school.

Emma's family business also influenced her comfort with one high school teacher. As discussed in the previous section, many non-FGS had familiarity with teachers as family members or friends. Through the restaurant, Emma, a FGS, was able to create a similar experience. Although in the interview, Emma indicated being hesitant about interacting with both high school teachers and college professors, she talked about one high school teacher with whom she had comfortable and informal interactions. This teacher regularly came to her family's

restaurant and developed a rapport with Emma's parents. As a result of this, Emma described interacting with this teacher in the same way that she interacted with other adults whom she regularly saw at the restaurant:

I've always grown up around businesses, because that's, like, what my family has done from forever, so we've always interacted with people, so, like, at the restaurant we have regulars who come in all the time and they feel almost like family. For me, I guess it's easier for me to gain a good relationship and a close relationship with those who I see all the time, so, like, for me I think it's easier to be closer with the teachers that I talk to everyday, and have a better relationship with them, because I'm so used to it already, and I've grown up that way.

In this example, Emma was able to successfully take a familiar field—her family's restaurant—and transfer the habitus she employed in this field to a different field—school. Thus, Emma's family's business, in some ways like some non-FGS' family experience with teachers, facilitated a more personal relationship with her teacher. In contrast to the non-FGS in the study, Emma felt this comfort with only one high school teacher, and may not have been able to transfer the comfort she felt with him to her relationships with other teachers. Nonetheless, she called upon her sense of familiarity with this one teacher as an example of how she might comfortably interact with professors in college in the future.

FGS Toni's, Emma's, and Stephanie's experiences suggest that their awareness of what to expect from college might have been initially limited, but that they used their social networks to form a better understanding of college. In other words, they relied on their social capital to help them access cultural capital to hone their perceptions of college and their understanding of what they needed to do there, and how they would be successful.

Of course, non-FGS also had older peers or possibly family business acquaintances whom they could have consulted; relevantly, though, the only non-FGS who mentioned these networks were students whose parents had gone to college in a different country. This may be because these parents' experience would have been less relevant or transferable to the students', and thus this subset of non-FGS looked outside of the family to build information about the college experience.

For example, Kory described how helpful the university's Facebook page had been, recalling that she used it to find out where to buy books:

[T]here's other students that show you, like this is better than this one, you should go here. And I think it's really good to get experienced people that are a little bit older than my age tell me exactly, because I'd rather get a cheaper textbook, the same kind, than a way more expensive one. And I think that the way that we can use Facebook and stuff to know is perfect....because I got my Sociology textbook for 25 bucks instead of like 75 bucks.

Kory also mentioned that she got additional information about college from the seniors in her IB (International Baccalaureate) program when she was a junior. Similarly, non-FGS Vashti recalled learning what to expect from the college application process when students who had gone through the college application process the previous year came to speak to her class in high school. Likewise, non-FGS Flaire relied on his cousin, "a very avid talker," to help him get a better sense of what to expect from college.

In addition to peers, siblings might influence students' perceptions of college. However, siblings were mentioned by these groups—the FGS or the non-FGS whose parents went to college in another country—less often than were older peers. This is likely because an unusually

large number (six out of eight) of the FGS in the study had no older siblings, and all three of the non-FGS whose parents had gotten their degrees outside of the U.S. were the oldest children in their families. The FGS who had older siblings who had gone to college—Emma and Jessica—did mention them as sources of information about college, though both said that their siblings had not been very helpful. The FGS who had no siblings often brought up older siblings as a potential source of wisdom to which they had not had access. For example, Toni said that her impressions of college were based on her friends’ experience and, besides that, they came from “[m]ostly just TV, honestly. Because I mean I’m an only child, so I didn’t have any brothers or sisters to watch. My mom was in school, but that was a really long time ago, and she didn’t finish, so... mostly just movies and stuff.” Elsewhere, Toni mentioned again how her friends’ experiences during Toni’s year off between high school and college countered her previous media-influenced understanding of college: “I think...the best part of my gap year was that all my friends went to school. So I got a lot of inside knowledge about how it was different from TV and movies, and things I kind of imagined in books and stuff.”

Interestingly, Toni was not the only FGS who mentioned the misleading influence of media. Emma and Mary Lou also brought TV and movies up as sources that shaped their perceptions of college, but that turned out to be erroneous. Social networks, in contrast, were reported as accurate sources of information.

Toni was very influenced by her friends’ experience in college, which is similar to the way FGS and non-FGS whose parents did not go to college in the US used older peers to help them gain knowledge about college. Access to peers’ or siblings’ cultural capital acted as a mitigating factor for certain students: It provided a way for them to get advice and understanding

that paralleled or substituted for the information that other students had access to through their parents.

All of the above examples illustrate ways in which students—particularly FGS and non-FGS whose parents studied in other countries—used their social networks to gain strategic knowledge about college. Meanwhile, non-FGS whose parents went to college in this country, and whose parents consequently possessed cultural capital about college most applicable to their children’s upcoming college experience, described or indicated acquiring some or most of this strategic knowledge from their parents. While they too may have acquired some of their information about college from social networks as well, they did not mention that directly in the interviews of focus groups.

As described earlier, FGS’ perceptions of college were formed largely through advice from people they knew through their social networks, whether through friends, acquaintances from the family business, or teachers. When FGS talked about this social capital, they did not generally connect it to the concept of “social networking.” Rather, they simply described how they acquired information from these individuals that shaped their perceptions about college.

In the individual interviews, the FGS did not use the term “social networking” to describe doing exactly that: accessing social networks for their professional and personal benefit. Likewise, they did not mention having been advised to network, or having been explicitly told about networking. Through their examples, though, the FGS participants illustrated that they had in fact networked, and had learned about the value of social networking through their successful—if sometimes unintentional—utilization of it. In the last phase of the study, however, when asked directly about social networking, FGS described how they learned about it from their personal experience with it and through other means. Some FGS described ways in which they

had learned about social networking through means other than their own direct experience. This was the case for Toni and Cristina, who used outside sources to access information about networking, as described below. This contrasted with non-FGS, who also mentioned the importance of networking, but credited their parents with instructing them on it. Interestingly, this applied to both non-FGS whose parents went to college in the United States and non-FGS whose parents went to college elsewhere. In both cases, the students were advised by their parents to network. Though this does not illustrate that these students' parents learned about social networking in college, it does suggest that college-educated parents were more aware of the value of networking than were the parents of FGS, and that, connected with this, they were more likely to advise their children directly on its value.

In the interviews, non-FGS Flair and Kory described how they had received advice from their parents about making social connections. Alluding to networking elsewhere in the interview, Flaire recalled his mother and father's advice about college:

My parents taught me to be very open, get to know people very quickly. Sixty percent of the help you get is from people around you that you met recently or your close friends instead of people you're related to you. My mom once said, "Don't ever think blood is thicker than water...sometimes water is thicker than blood."

Though students of other backgrounds mentioned, directly or indirectly, the importance of networking, in the interviews and focus groups, without exception, it was only non-FGS who reported getting that advice from parents. This again reflects a highly practical example of cultural capital being passed on from one generation to the next.

While both FGS and non-FGS mentioned networking, in contrast to the non-FGS' source of knowledge about networking, FGS learned about it from life experience and advice from

others. As described earlier, Stephanie and Emma, the FGS whose mothers own businesses, spent much of their childhoods in these businesses, where they got to know customers and learned that those customers would share information and connections with them. Both had had experiences where the customers, or someone a customer knew, would give them advice about college or careers, or help set up an internship for them. Emma had found that these social networks were based on personal connections: “When they know your family, they feel more connected to you and they can help.” Similarly, through the connections made with her mother’s customers, Stephanie learned that “If I couldn’t figure it out, [I could] find someone who could help.” This method of learning about networking—through first-hand experience—provides an important contrast to the non-FGS, whose parents instructed them on the value of networks.

Other FGS found out about networking through life experiences as well. For example, Toni first encountered the concept when, in an interview, she was asked for her LinkedIn profile. Unfamiliar with this social media, she researched it and discovered the value placed on making connections. This new knowledge was reinforced soon thereafter on a college tour, where the guide told the students that attending a HBCU was particularly beneficial for Black women, who otherwise, as Toni recalled, “won’t have those connections that other people have.”

Cristina, also an FGS, described how she learned about networking online: “I like to look up a lot of stuff, I like to know as much as I can before I get into something. So before actually coming here I looked up a lot about how to make time at college a success. One of the things I came across and never thought about before was on networking.” As with Toni, the value of networking was then reiterated at a college tour that she attended: “One of the things they told us was that networking was important.” After that, she read up more on this topic: “Then looking up

more on articles and stuff and it was, like, get to know people and get to know professors real well.”

Michael, similarly, sought out information online. A FGS, he mentioned the importance of getting internships. This advice is readily available “when you’re reading online,” he explained. Reading about college online, he learned that internships are “one of the most important things you can do, to set yourself up for the future.” While a non-FGS might learn about the importance of social networking and getting an internship from a parent, who was more likely to have worked with interns or have participated in an internship himself or herself, Michael found this information on his own.

These students’ experiences demonstrated how FGS used resources to access information about college that non-FGS, like Kory and Flaire, might get from their parents. In this case, they accessed their existing social networks—their social capital—to learn about the value of social capital. Sometimes this was accomplished through personal experience, which led the students to recognize that their social connections provided important information and opportunities; other times, FGS learned about the concept of networking as advice or suggestion from a person in their network, such as a college tour guide or a potential employer.

Although networking is a concept not specific to college, a college experience is often viewed as an important way to establish networks, and those networks often include professors: Though that did not specifically come up in the interviews, Stephanie and Emma, both FGS, mentioned it in the focus group. Stephanie introduced and Emma agreed with the idea that professors can help you find internships and other opportunities. Thus, students’ perceptions of networking, and the origins of their knowledge about it, are relevant to their perceptions of faculty-student interaction and why (or whether) it is important.

Teachers and Prior Schooling

“All of my teachers, before we graduated, let us know that you need to know the professors and their teaching beforehand, so email them, talk to them.” (Non-FGS Kory, whose parents did not go to college in the US)

Students across the FGS spectrum described the advice from one group in their social network—their high school teachers—in ways that indicated that their teachers were very influential. Notably, first-generation college students mentioned this advice more than other students. As was the case with seeking advice from older peers and acquaintances, non-FGS whose parents went to college in other countries displayed responses similar to FGS’, also describing the significant role that their teachers played in their perceptions of college.

Stephanie, Emma, and Mary Lou, all FGS whose parents had no college experience, described in detail their teachers’ advice about college and how to be successful there. Some of this advice was practical, such as using available resources, “really listening to what teachers say” (Stephanie), and taking the skills from high school “to a new level” (Emma). Other advice was more holistic, such as Stephanie’s teacher’s guidance to not just learn for tests and grades, but rather “taking in that information and holding in your brain, [and] in your heart.”

Renee and Michael, both FGS whose parents had some college experience, also reported that their teachers’ descriptions of college influenced their perceptions. Again, some of this was practical and directly study-related, but other times, it was more about having a good experience in college and persevering. Michael, for example, recalled, “They’d tell anecdotes about how they themselves were struggling at one point, and this is what worked for them or how they were able to stay afloat.” Renee, similarly, recalled how her teachers’ advice about college had helped shape her expectations.

Non-FGS LeeAnne, whose dad graduated from college, but whose Bible college experience LeeAnne felt was very different from what she anticipated college would be like, was strongly impacted by both teachers and the guidance counselor at her small private high school. She described at length not only their advice but also the ways in which their experiences served as models for what she expected from college. She explained how one teacher “told me once you go to grad school, you actually become really close with some of your teachers because, like, they’ll invite you, she had teachers invite her to their house, like you have to create a personal relationship with the teachers then.” This description, coupled with the stories from her other teachers and counselor, influenced LeeAnne’s expectations.

Two other non-FGS who are also first-generation Americans, Kory and Vashti, were clearly influenced by their teachers’ experiences, both in terms of modeling and of advice. Kory recalled that two of her teachers had recently finished their doctorates, and when Kory was working on her large senior writing project, they told her, “I just did this, so I’m going to help you.” Vashti recalled her favorite teacher telling her not to be so hard on herself in college, and to be careful not to burn out. Now that she was in college, she said, “That has really stuck with me and I have started to relax a little bit, not doing homework all the time or not trying to do several different things.”

Though there are similarities in how high school teachers helped shape students’ perceptions of college, non-FGS like Kory and Vashti were more likely to recognize their teachers’ modeling and to report personal advice from their teachers, while FGS were more likely to recall the specific advice about studying that they received. This may be explained by the fact that non-FGS, including Kory and Vashti, were more likely than FGS to receive advice from parents that was directly about college and applicable to what they were experiencing in

this field. Thus the FGS' primary source of academic advice came from teachers, while the non-FGS—whether or not their parents had gone to college in the US—had multiple potential sources of this type of advice.

There are mitigating factors that make the differences among FGS, non-FGS whose parents went to college in the US, and non-FGS whose parents went to college outside the US difficult to analyze: The non-FGS in this study were more likely than FGS to be first-generation American and to have more personalized high school experiences, in a private school or IB program. For all of the participants, advanced classes, in particular IB and AP classes, seemed to provide guidance—directly or indirectly—to students on how to interact with faculty; notably, all three participants who had been in IB programs were non-FGS who were also first-generation Americans. Although the root cause is not always clear, the differences in perceptions about college and faculty-student interactions, and the origins of these perceptions are noteworthy, and do reflect that students whose parents did not have college experiences similar to their own often use their social capital, derived from social networks, in order to access cultural capital.

For both FGS and non-FGS, students who were relatively experienced and comfortable interacting with their high school teachers indicated that they expected this kind of relationship to continue with their instructors in college. Cristina, a FGS who took many AP classes as a high school student, had already had this experience in college: After a class during her second week of college, she explained, she and her instructor “were just talking...and it reminded me of freshman year [of high school] when I talked to my instructional law teacher for one and a half hours after school one day.” Cristina's high school classes had given her opportunities to have intellectual conversations with her teachers outside of class, and her college experience so far had mirrored that.

When asked about their expectations for interacting with faculty, students frequently mentioned their advanced classes as places where they had been able to develop personal relationships with teachers in high school. For example, to complete her senior project, non-FGS Kory had worked one-on-one with her high school teacher and IB coordinator over the summer and during the school year. In addition to this college-like experience, IB had given Kory an environment in which discussion was expected in class, and asking for help from the teacher was welcome outside of class. Because of this, she said, she was outgoing in classes, and comfortable with the prospect of going to see her professors for assistance.

Toni also credited her advanced classes and teachers with instilling a sense of comfort with teachers; in her case, however, she called upon her experiences in gifted classes in elementary and middle school, which she described as “a very communicative, interacting kind of place.” She thought that her comfort with teachers went back to elementary school, where “I didn’t make any friends, so I got really, really close to my fourth grade teacher, and that made the communication [easier].” The experiences of FGS Toni and non-FGS Kory illustrate how students’ prior experiences with teachers in school helped them develop a habitus that was applicable in college, as well. In the study, these types of experiences did not seem to be strongly tied to first-generation status.

While these small classes and close relationships were one way in which advanced classes might have increased students’ comfort with similar situations in college, or might have opened up the possibility of students’ seeking out close relationships with faculty, advanced classes offered another benefit related to faculty-student interaction: specific advice about it. For students who would not receive such advice elsewhere—which included students who did not

have personal familiarity with the field of the American university—advanced classes offered cultural capital that was of immediate benefit to them as college students.

Non-FGS Kory was one example of this. She received very specific advice in high school about communicating with her professors. She described how her IB teachers told her to contact her professors directly, and explained why this was important:

All of my teachers, before we graduated, let us know that you need to know the professors and their teaching beforehand, so email them, talk to them. And even though they may not know your face, they have the name in mind, so if they figure out maybe you're struggling with something, they will be OK to help you if you let them know beforehand what kind of personality you have, or what kind of student you are.

Kory reported that she had followed this advice at the beginning of this first semester of college, and felt that she had established good rapport with both of her professors.

Vashti received and followed a similar piece of advice, and demonstrated an awareness of the benefit of having this cultural capital:

All of my counselors, when they were guiding us through the college application process and the expectations from college admissions, they told us that it's always a good thing to send a little thank-you email so they've all at least heard your name somehow somewhere so you're not just another face in the crowd of 31,000. You're the name that they at least have a little sense of what you are and what you appreciate. So that trait, if I'd not been to public school or I would not have been with my high school counselor, I don't think I would've had that trait.

Providing some contrast, Mary Lou, a FGS, received advice from a teacher that might be equally practical and well-intentioned, but was more about adjusting to college. Mary Lou's

teacher described college as a place where professors are not particularly interested in their students, but his story seemed to suggest that this was something college students had to expect and accept. The teacher's story—or Mary Lou's interpretation of it—did not indicate that students should take steps to initiate or improve relationships with faculty members:

The main messages I've heard are from the teachers who really helped me with my college career, a lot of them were like, "You've got to work hard, and you've got to do it by yourself, because a lot of people here are not going to help you along the way as much as they would in high school."

Mary Lou heard other advice from teachers that made professors sound intimidating: "[M]y teachers liked to tell stories of their crazy professors that kicked people out and threw their book bags out the window. True story." Like non-FGS Kory, the information passed on from the high school teacher influenced her expectations in college.

The advice that Mary Lou got may be accurate in some situations, just as the advice that Kory and Vashti received is likely also accurate in certain circumstances. There are many possible explanations for the difference in advice. The difference might reflect individual circumstances or might be related to first-generation status. For example, either Mary Lou or FGS overall might be more influenced by teachers' dramatic stories, as these stories add to the media-inspired ideas of scary and crazy professors. Alternatively, it might reflect a school, class, or school system in which students are being prepared for a different kind of college experience. Or instead, the difference might simply be due to a different teacher, or to different students remembering different advice. Regardless, all these students' recounting of their high school teachers' advice about interacting with faculty in college influenced them, and may have helped set the stage for how the students ultimately communicated with their professors. In all cases,

students were affected by the advice, guidance, and modeling about college that their teachers provided, illustrating that a teacher's own perceptions about college can impact their students in lasting ways. Furthermore, because FGS might receive less advice and information overall about college than do their non-FGS peers, the knowledge that they gain from their high school teachers might be ultimately more impactful.

This section illustrated how outside experiences, tied to accessing social capital, often helped a student gain similar or equally applicable cultural capital to that which a non-FGS might have gotten directly from parents. This emerged as a trend for both FGS and non-FGS whose parents studied in another country, possibly because the parents of these groups of students would not possess the practical knowledge about college that other parents of non-FGS might have. Thus, the students in these groups were often strongly influenced by the stories, advice, and experiences of their high school teachers.

Upbringing

“My parents always tell me to ask questions.” (FGS Renee)

In addition to the direct influence that parental advice and connections had on students' perceptions of college and of faculty-student interaction, some FGS' perceptions of faculty-student interaction were impacted by parenting styles or elements of their upbringing. These parenting styles were not directly related to parental education level, but in some ways, as a result of the parenting style of their upbringing, FGS learned skills that were useful to them in college. In some cases, these skills contributed to the social and cultural capital that benefited these FGS in college.

For reasons unrelated to their parents' education levels, some students grew up very much on their own, and had to learn to care for themselves. This was the case with both Jessica,

whose immigrant parents did not know English and worked long hours, and for Mary Lou, whose father died when she was a baby and whose mother battled drug addiction. As a result of these circumstances, both Mary Lou and Jessica said that they had learned to take care of themselves. Although both of these students were unsure or hesitant about interacting with professors, they had developed relationships with teachers in high school, who had in turn provided them with information and resources about college. Both Mary Lou and Jessica had learned to access a social network that offered them the cultural capital they needed to get to college, and both suggested that their independence and self-reliance would be beneficial in college. This illustrates how a circumstance not necessarily related to parental education level contributed indirectly to a FGS' social and cultural capital.

In contrast to Mary Lou and Jessica's parents, who were mostly absent, FGS Toni's single mom was highly involved in Toni's education, and in teaching her how to interact with adults. As an only child, Toni was taught to call adults by their first names and to be inquisitive. Describing her mom's explicit and implicit lessons in inquiry, Toni explained, "When she told me to do something...if I didn't understand it, she wanted me to ask her so that I could understand it...She just wanted me to be comfortable asking questions to people." It is easy to see how this early lesson, which was not directly attributable to her mother's education, might have later influenced how Toni perceived interaction with teachers and, later still, with professors.

Cristina's father, who did not have a college education, encouraged her to interact with adults, as well. As Cristina explained, "My dad was the one who encouraged discussion. As far as the discussion aspect, being engaged when talking and throwing ideas around: That's

definitely my father's influence again." Again, it is not difficult to connect these early lessons with a later comfort with teachers and college faculty.

First-generation college student Renee heard the same message from her mother about the value of asking questions: "She said, 'If you don't understand something, ask questions. If you still don't understand, keep asking, until you understand.'" The lack of a college degree did not keep FGS Cristina's, Toni's, or Renee's parents from guiding them towards an aspect of habitus that would be familiar and often welcomed in a college setting. As the students described it, the advice that they received was not specifically intended for the school setting. However, significantly, it was similar to the advice that non-FGS such as LG received specifically about school. As LG described, "My parents always tell me to ask questions. I try [to follow their advice]. They're always, like, 'Oh, you're asking me questions, you should ask your teacher questions when you're in class.'"

For Cristina, Toni and Renee, all FGS, their parents' child-rearing philosophies, which included encouraging their children to be inquisitive, intentionally or inadvertently taught them a skill that was applicable in college. Although non-FGS, such as LG, Cassie, and Philip, might have learned the value of asking questions specifically in the context of advice for school or college, these FGS learned about it as a life skill. In this way, these students acquired similar cultural capital to that of their non-FGS peers, but through a different means.

Another very different factor in students' upbringings that was not dependent on their parents' education level, but which may have influenced how they interacted with faculty, was their hometown. Both Cassie, a non-FGS, and Renee, a FGS, believed that growing up in small towns made them more comfortable communicating with adults, including specifically teachers. Renee explained that her high level of comfort interacting with high school teachers was rooted

in the small town where she grew up. Comparing interactions with professors to interactions with high school teachers, she explained, “I come from a very small town, so I’ve definitely interacted with my high school teachers in public, so it’s basically the same thing. Like, I’ve seen my high school teacher at a bar before, and I said hi to him. It’s not weird.” Similarly, Cassie said that her comfort with professors came from “[p]robably being raised in a small town where I knew everyone” and as a result of this experience growing up, she enjoyed getting to know people and found communication with all adults to be effortless. For both Cassie and Renee, a small town environment may have inculcated a habitus that allowed them to interact with adults, including those of different social classes, with ease.

All of the FGS mentioned in this section illustrated how different aspects of their upbringings helped them obtain knowledge and skills that could be beneficial to them in college. Although most of the time this cultural capital did not seem to be passed on with college specifically in mind, it provided FGS with capital that may have been equivalent or equally applicable to success in college.

Faculty-Student Interaction: Motives

Background determines the cultural capital that a student brings to college. Factors affecting that cultural capital include whether a student’s parents attended or graduated from college, and whether the student’s parents went to college in the US. The participants in this study came to college with different kinds of cultural capital, which was reflected in the ways that their perceptions of college and the origins of those perceptions seemed to differ, most often in conjunction with FGS status.

Despite these differences, students named very similar motives for, encouragements for, and impediments to faculty-student interaction. Students identified a number of factors that affected their willingness or ability to initiate or participate in faculty-student interaction. These factors included their interest level in the subject, their preparation for class, their comfort among their classmates, and the personality of their instructor. These factors did not appear to correlate with first-generation background, though some differences emerged when FGS talked about professors' personalities and when they described the role that participation grades played in their level of engagement.

On the preliminary questionnaire, students did not name motives for interacting with professors, nor did they identify encouragements or impediments for doing so. In fact, faculty-student interaction was not mentioned at all initially. When participants were asked about traits of a successful college student, responses were similar from students across the spectrum of first-generation college student status. Students mentioned the importance of time management, focus, a work ethic, and organizational skills. Regardless of parental education level, students worried about all of these things, and expressed both confidence and doubt about their abilities to be successful. A handful of students, FGS and non-FGS alike, identified positive characteristics potentially and tangentially related to faculty-student interaction, including being inquisitive, outgoing, communicative, opinionated and attentive. Notably, none of the incoming first-year student participants surveyed directly identified any type of faculty-student interaction as important for college success.

In the interviews, however, when students were asked specifically about faculty-student interaction, both FGS and non-FGS acknowledged its importance. In many ways, they saw its value manifested similarly: Such interactions would provide a greater opportunity to learn and a

chance to share opinions with others; it could facilitate understanding of specific assignments; and it could help in the future with obtaining recommendation letters. Recognizing the value of faculty-student interaction, students named all of these things as motives for engaging in interactions with faculty.

Significantly, all of these new college students expressed willingness and intention to interact with faculty in the future, although overall, FGS described more impediments to and doubts about this prospect. There were other differences in students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction which seemed to be related to their FGS status. Regarding in-class participation, for example, for FGS, grades were a stronger motivating factor to participate in class. As described previously, while all students had in some way expressed the desire to meet their instructors' expectations, non-FGS indicated a greater level of comfort with informal faculty-student interactions and more confidence that professors would view and interact with them as equals.

Faculty-student interaction can be formal or informal, and can take place in class or out of class. As incoming first-year students, not surprisingly, the participants exhibited a limited understanding of what faculty-student interaction encompassed. However, students who had taken advanced classes in high school, and particularly those who were in IB programs, demonstrated more awareness of it. Most frequently, when asked about their in-class interactions, students talked about participating in discussions or answering an instructor's questions. With out-of-class interaction, although a few students mentioned office hours, most students either considered a real or hypothetical situation of encountering a professor on the street or in a restaurant or imagined a scenario of being friends with their professors at some point in the future. While these responses illustrated an incomplete or simplified understanding

of faculty-student interaction, students were able to describe their perceptions of it, along with the origins of those perceptions and the encouragements and impediments they felt to interacting with faculty.

Overall, two themes regarding participants' motives for interacting with faculty emerged in the interviews. The first theme centered on students' interest in exchanging ideas, both with professors and facilitated by them, through individual interactions with faculty or through discussions in class. Participants displayed a common understanding that the exchange of ideas, especially when some of those ideas originate from the professor, facilitates learning. The second theme focused on students' views of how faculty-student interaction would foster their academic success; this included concrete examples of faculty providing assistance, such as helping on assignments, writing recommendations, or determining grades.

While FGS and non-FGS spoke similarly about enjoying the exchange of ideas and the chance to learn, some small differences emerged in FGS' and non-FGS' ideas surrounding the second theme. While both groups of students saw their professors as instrumental in their own academic success and both groups identified discussing assignments and asking for recommendations as reasons for interacting with faculty, FGS were more likely than non-FGS to identify grades, and in particular participation grades, as reasons for these interactions.

Learning

“If I’m more active in the class, then I’ll learn better.” (FGS Emma)

“[W]hen I’m in class, I really like to engage in stuff, because that’s better... My understanding just gets better and better.” (Non-FGS Kory)

Describing interactions with their professors, students of all backgrounds expressed that a desire to learn was an important motive for having faculty-student interactions. In some cases,

they identified that in-class interactions, specifically participating in discussions and asking questions, facilitated this learning. In other cases, they described ways in which one-on-one interactions with faculty more broadly contributed to their learning.

Overall, many students, both FGS and non-FGS, recognized that in-class discussions furthered their learning. For example, non-FGS Flaire and FGS Cristina, from very different backgrounds, had similarly positive assessments of interactive classes. Flaire grew up in the United States, but returned to his native country for his last two years of high school. The semester after he graduated from high school, he took a couple of college classes there “for fun,” before returning to the United States to enroll in the university here. He positively contrasted the discussion-based college classes of the United States with the lecture-heavy classes of his native country: “Here you are actually involved in the class... You learn here.” Likewise, Cristina said, succinctly, “I like to be active because then I know I’m learning.”

Emma, a FGS, described how her personality contributed to her desire to participate in class and to learn more: “I feel like if I’m more active in the class, then I’ll learn better, because I’m a more interactive person. So I’ll learn more if people are communicating with me and helping me, like, every step of the way.” Like Flaire, Emma recognized that—perhaps due to her own personality—she learned more when she was engaged, and when others were active, as well.

Michael, a FGS who described himself as a quiet individual and an observer throughout his interview, nonetheless saw active learning as more effective for him than passive learning. He specifically identified one aspect of learning that he felt was better achieved in a discussion-based class than a lecture: the ability to analyze concepts. He went on to express a desire to be

more engaged in these types of classes as a result, and more likely to participate in class discussions.

Similarly, Cassie, Rose, and Kory, all non-FGS, described specifically the ways in which discussion-based classes helped them learn through active engagement, both with people and with ideas. Contrasting her experience in lecture-based classes with discussion-based classes, Cassie explained:

I kind of like lecture classes, because I kind of don't have to do much--just sit there and listen and read the notes. But it doesn't... I don't get as much from them as I do from the discussion classes because I'm not taking ideas in and putting them back out and then reevaluating my ideas. I'm just kind of getting the information.

In this example, Cassie recognized that discussion-based classes were more challenging to her, but that she nonetheless preferred them because they contributed to her intellectual growth.

Rose also described how the external processing of a discussion-based course facilitated her learning, focusing on how it allowed her to put together different ideas and views:

I love discussion-based class... You get to say out loud what you're thinking, and work through each of the loopholes, work through each of the concepts with other people who may or may not be with you on your thinking. And it adds to your horizons, and adds to your experiences of, like, there are people who think like this and people who think like this, and neither of these is wrong, it's just how they think.

Unlike Cassie, Rose did not suggest that lecture-based classes were easier, but she and Cassie both identified the exchange of ideas as furthering her understanding of ideas.

Describing a discussion-based course she was currently taking, Kory recognized how processing ideas helped her to ultimately understand them:

I feel like the class gives me my perspective to voice, and then I learn from other people's things. Because, like, I don't really understand somebody else's point of view, but when they explain it, it gives me insight of what they think. And so when I'm in class, I really like to engage in stuff, because that's better... My understanding just gets better and better.

In very similar ways to Cassie and Kory, FGS Renee and Toni talked about how the desire to understand was reason for participating in class. Rather than focusing on discussions, however, they considered how asking questions in class contributed to their learning. Renee described her tendency to ask for clarification: "I like to ask questions because I like to super understand what's happening."

Toni, meanwhile, emphasized the value of asking questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the course matter: "I think I'm a good student in a class because I like to talk and, like, ask questions and figure stuff out...I'm always wanting to understand. I mean...I've said it before: I want to understand everything." In both cases, these FGS—much like their non-FGS peers—identified the desire to learn and to understand as motives for interacting with a faculty member.

Both in-class questions and class discussions illustrate fairly basic kinds of interaction with professors. In part because of time constraints, questions that students ask in class are usually focused—about a specific concept or problem, for example. With in-class discussions, while a professor often acts as facilitator or occasional contributor, participation is a relatively indirect and even impersonal way for a student to interact with faculty. In interviews and focus groups, these were not the only kinds of interactions that students discussed.

Some students, again both FGS and non-FGS, identified ways in which more substantial interactions contributed to their overall learning. For instance, Cristina, a FGS who had the opportunity as a high school student to be in small, discussion-based classes, expressed appreciation for the conversations that she had had with her high school teachers. Significantly, although she had only been in college for a couple of weeks when our interview took place, she hoped to have similar conversations with her college instructors, as well:

I really love talking to professors or teachers about stuff that I'm interested in learning. It helps engage in conversation...I have probably had the most life-changing conversations with my teachers from high school, and I'm hoping to carry that into college and learn more from my professors than just what they teach in the classroom.

Kory, a non-FGS whose educational background resembled FGS Cristina's, described her desire to get direct feedback from her instructor in the course she was currently taking:

He's very blunt, and I love criticism. And when I showed him my topic for my group presentation, he look[ed] at it, took his pen and marked it all up, and I loved that. Because I don't feel bad, I'm not hurt... It's just like you're telling me how you want the presentation done the right way, and I really appreciate that, because I don't want to present something not good enough.

Kory and Cristina both described their desire to delve into ideas and discussions with their instructors in high school and in college. Their interest levels appeared to be very similar to one another, and—as with most other students—did not seem to reflect anything about their FGS status.

Like Kory, Mary Lou, a FGS who was also in advanced classes in high school, and who developed close mentoring relationships with teachers throughout elementary and high school,

also mentioned criticism as she considered the longer-term student-instructor relationship and its effect on her as a learner and as a person: “I feel like being able to take criticism and learn from people is central, because they're not here to give you grades, they're here to help you become better students and better people in your life.” Mary Lou’s comment reflected a view similar to Kory’s and Cristina’s, that faculty-student interaction would improve her overall learning.

All of these students, whether they were talking about discussions, questions, or more sustained one-on-one exchanges, identified learning as an important reason for interacting with faculty. First-generation status did not seem to play a role in this. Davis (2010) and Stephens et al. (2012) find that FGS often identify an interest in learning, or in becoming a better thinker, as reasons that they are in college. Although Stephens et al. (2012) determine through their quantitative study that FGS are less likely to indicate these kinds of reasons than are non-FGS, those differences were not evident in my own study. In my individual interviews and focus groups, there was not a noticeable difference in the frequency with which non-FGS and FGS mentioned these as motives for being in college or for interacting with faculty.

Sharing Opinions

“I really want to know what other people have to say.” (FGS Michael)

“I will very patiently listen to other people’s opinion and I will sincerely consider them before thrusting my opinion on them.” (Non-FGS Vashti)

Moving away from directly identifying learning or understanding as motives for being interactive in class, some students, irrespective of background, saw the sharing of opinions as a way to create a more interesting and enjoyable class experience. Michael, a FGS, focused on hearing others’ views: “I do find discussion to be enjoyable, especially hearing others’ points of view about stuff that I can never think of in that way. So I think that’s what really allows me to

be really engaged, is that I really want to know what other people have to say.” In the interviews, Michael described—and presented—himself as a reserved individual, and his preferred type of in-class interaction reflected this: He was more interested in listening and contemplating, though here and elsewhere in his interview, he indicated that he was willing to share his opinions with others in class, as well.

Other students also described how they liked having the opportunity to express their own opinions in discussions. Stephanie, a FGS, mentioned her desire both to express her opinion and to hear others’, as well: “I’m really hands-on, and I like to get to know other people’s opinions, but I like other people to know that my opinion is still there.” Meanwhile, Renee, also a FGS, appreciated the opportunity to share her own opinions: “I just like to be heard. I don’t like hiding in the background. So I guess it’s just a part of my personality.” While it is possible that habitus influenced students’ comfort with in-class participation, the interviews did not provide evidence that students’ interest in participation was correlated with first generation status. Often, as was apparent with both Michael and Renee, students associated their interest in listening or in talking in class with their personalities, rather than with any other factors. The three FGS described above, for example, reported different levels of activity in their classes, which seemed dependent on the personalities that they exhibited or reported.

Many non-FGS, including Cassie and Rose, described their interest in hearing and expressing opinions in ways very similar to Renee, Michael and Stephanie. Cassie, describing the small class in which she was currently enrolled, said, “It’s a discussion class, and I really like [that] it’s discussion-based because that means I get to put my opinion out there and be heard.” Rose expressed a similar view: “I like discussion based classes for that reason, that you’ve got a chance to process out your thoughts and hear what other people think too.”

Vashti, a non-FGS whose parents were highly involved in her schooling, wrote on her questionnaire that a successful college student has “strong personal opinions, but [is] ready to listen to others.” She elaborated on this in the interview: “When it comes to discussing my opinion, I will bluntly state my opinion, but I will very patiently listen to other people’s opinion and I will sincerely consider them before thrusting my opinion on them.” Though non-FGS Vashti’s confidence in the classroom might result from her being comfortable in the university field, the non-FGS’ descriptions of their habitus in the classroom were so similar to the descriptions given by FGS that it would be impossible to attribute the desire to participate in class to FGS status and an inculcated habitus associated with that status.

The desire to share one’s opinion, like the desire to learn, might be related to personality or to educational experiences in which discussion or inquisitiveness was encouraged. These examples point to a lack of correlation, as suggested in my study, between first-generation college status and the desire to share one’s opinion with others or to interact with a faculty member in order to facilitate learning.

Understanding Assignments

“I like asking questions, because it makes me feel more confident about what I’m doing afterwards.” (FGS Renee)

“I know, if I’m struggling, I’ve got to ask for help.” (Non-FGS Rose)

In addition to seeking out interaction with faculty in order to learn, both FGS and non-FGS identified the more specific desire to understand a particular assignment or concept as a reason to communicate with faculty. While this communication could happen inside or outside of class, most students brought it up in the context of out-of-class interaction.

As they considered the college careers that they were embarking on, Rose and Kory, both non-FGS who participated in the rigorous IB program, sounded confident about seeking out assistance if they needed it. Rose reflected on how her high school experience prepared her for the challenges of college: “[H]aving taken IB, academically I’m not too worried, just because I know, if I’m struggling, I’ve got to ask for help.” Kory, meanwhile, emphasized her comfort with going to her professors with questions: “I think that if you go ask for help, it’s only going to help... So I think I’ve grown really fond of getting to know my professors, so I’m not shy to ask for help.” Both of these non-FGS attributed their willingness to ask professors for help to previous academic experience. Of course, it is possible that comfort with this interaction might differ between FGS and non-FGS, neither the motive for going—to get assistance—nor the intention to go seemed affected by FGS status.

LeeAnne, a non-FGS with a high school experience that was less rigorous than Kory’s or Rose’s, expressed willingness—but less eagerness—to seek out her professors’ help: “I pictured I wouldn’t ever interact with my professor unless I needed, like, help with my schoolwork or had questions.” In the interviews, LeeAnne presented as less confident than did Rose or Kory. Within the scope of this study, it would not be possible to explain the reason for that difference, but the motive for interacting with faculty—to obtain assistance—was similar among all three students.

The perception that one could or would go to professors for help was not confined to non-FGS. Stephanie, a FGS whose parents had not attended college at all, applied past experiences with teachers to her expectations for college. When asked about the ways that she thought her background might influence her interaction with professors outside of class, she said the willingness to go to her professors with questions came “I think from personal experiences with me having questions about assignments or me not getting a good grade on an assignment because

I didn't talk to the teacher.” Based on this past experience, and perhaps influenced by other factors related to cultural and social capital, Stephanie’s willingness to seek out help from faculty did not appear to differ from non-FGS Kory’s, Rose’s, or LeeAnne’s.

Finally, Renee, also a FGS, saw herself as more willing than other students to go to her instructors for assistance and clarification. She also articulated how she would apply an instructor’s answers to her questions:

A problem with some college students is that they don’t ask questions because they think that they’re not supposed to, that they’re supposed to know what they’re doing. But I like to ask a lot of questions all of the time... I like asking questions, because it makes me feel more confident about what I’m doing afterwards. I’m like, I’ve already asked this question, so when I’m working on it later, I know the answer, I write it down. I don’t like to guess. It makes me very unsure.

Though Renee considered herself more likely to get help from the instructor, students of all first-generation statuses expressed that they would go to a faculty member if they felt they needed assistance on an assignment. Thus, though comfort level or habitus might differ, the motive of seeking clarification or help appeared to be unrelated to first-generation status.

Recommendations

“My knowledge of recommendations comes from college applications in high school.”

(Non-FGS Cassie)

Students recognized pragmatic benefits to interacting with faculty that went beyond the specific class and that might be longer-term. The specific benefit that both FGS and non-FGS most frequently identified was the importance of obtaining recommendation letters from faculty members in the future.

For example, Jessica and Cristina, FGS from very different backgrounds, expressed this same motive for making connections with their professors. Jessica explained, “I feel like if you participate in class and sort of get to know the professors, they probably give you a better recommendation in the future.” Cristina had a similar understanding: “It’s obviously smart to get to know your professors because they might be doing research you’re interested in or be able to help you out with recommendations for schools or programs that you want to get into or scholarships.” Both students recognized that professors could provide letters of recommendation in the future, and that the recommendations were likely to be better if the professors were more acquainted with the students.

Non-FGS Vashti not only identified recommendations as a reason for interacting with professors, but also predicted the frequency of that answer, saying that getting “better recommendations” was “the same answer all students will give.” Later in her interview, she reiterated the importance of the recommendations: “That, again, goes back to making your teacher know you in the class and making sure that your teacher will write you a good recommendation in the future.” Non-FGS Vashti’s hope of making a positive impression on her professors so that they would be able to write better recommendation letters sounded quite similar to FGS Jessica’s and Cristina’s motives.

Students’ strong awareness of the importance of recommendations, along with the fact that FGS and non-FGS were equally likely to mention them, reflected a shared cultural capital. In the focus groups, the origin of this shared capital became clear, as all students identified “college applications” as the source of their knowledge about the value of recommendation letters. This elucidated why one central element of college, recommendations, was so commonly and similarly mentioned by both FGS and non-FGS: Rather than receiving this cultural capital

from parents, all students reported having obtained it from their common experience of applying to college.

Grades

“If it’s worth more...you would definitely participate more.” (FGS Stephanie)

In the interviews, all participants were asked, “What factors made you more likely to participate in class?” The answers to this question touched on a plethora of topics, including those addressed above. In addition to uncovering encouragements and impediments to participating, the answers often also revealed students’ perceptions of faculty-student interaction, and whether or why a student would choose to interact with his/her professors. One view that emerged centered on grades, with four students expressing the idea that a participation grade would be the primary reason for engaging in such interactions. Of these students, three were FGS, including the two students whose parents had the lowest level of education (less than high school).

The only non-FGS who perceived grades as a reason to participate in class was Philip, whose answers often more resembled the responses given by FGS. He said he had based his decision of whether to participate in the two classes he was taking on whether participation was evaluated in each class. Reflecting a strong concern with grades, he also considered how his own participation might affect his classmates’ grades, as well as his own. He explained that, in one of his classes:

There’s a participation grade, so you’re graded for it, so you pretty much have to do it. So I try to do it as much as possible... But I try to not overly do it, because there are other people in the class who are also trying to get a grade, so I try to limit myself but not too much because it’ll affect me, because other people’s grades also depend on

participating....But then [the other class] doesn't have a participation grade, so it doesn't matter so much.

In this interview, Philip did not indicate that he was a very strong student, but he nonetheless identified obtaining a good grade as the primary motive for his in-class participation level.

Similarly, Stephanie, a FGS who identified as a high-achieving but shy student in primary and secondary school, said she would participate more in class if it were graded.

Discussing participation, she explained:

If it's worth more, instead of just being, like, an assignment, like if it was worth what we do, like a core grade, you would definitely participate more. If there was extra credit, and you weren't at the highest level that you could be, if you were like borderline, I think I would do that more. I think those are the main things.

Later in the interview, she again mentioned grades as a primary motivation for participating:

Like with extra credit, or if it's worth more, because then I feel like I have to put more of myself into it, because that grade is the determining factor on whether or not I get those college credits, and whether or not the money was worth, whether it went to good, or whether it went down the drain.

These comments illustrated the desire to meet the professor's expectations by being active in class, a desire shared by FGS and non-FGS. In addition to that, however, the comments also suggest that Stephanie, unlike most students, was consciously motivated by participation grades.

Indirectly, Jessica, also a FGS, described being motivated by grades. When she was asked what would encourage her to interact with a faculty member, she based her expectations of college on her experience in high school, responding:

When I apply for jobs and everything, they're probably going to see my grades, and I guess getting to know them better, I'm guessing it would make them grade you easier on tests or whatever, because that's what it was like in senior year. It was sort of like a trade-off: If I went to the robotics team, I didn't really have to do homework, he would just like give me the grade because it's like he needs people, so I'm sort of like helping out.

Another FGS, Renee, did not directly mention earning a better grade as a motive for participating in class, but was the only other student to make a direct connection between grades and participation when asked about the factors that made her more likely to participate in class. After talking about her high level of participation in class, she concluded with a confident statement: "I've never had a problem with getting a good participation grade in my school experiences."

Although FGS Toni did not mention grades as a motivating force in her interview, she was not surprised when it was mentioned in the focus group. An anthropology and sociology major from a working class family, she offered an analysis of FGS' tendency to focus more on grades:

It makes sense, why first-generation college students would be more motivated by grades, because you want to graduate. It's not so much about being here and enjoying it. I also think that first-generation students are more likely to be low socioeconomically so it makes sense they'd want to get their money's worth, rather than just, oh, "Have fun in college, you know, it's the best years of your life."

FGS Toni's analysis revealed her understanding of the mindset and motivations of FGS. Her analysis also elucidated the differences in capital that FGS and non-FGS bring to and expect from college: FGS may be more cognizant of the economic capital that one acquires as a result

of college, while non-FGS might have the privilege of focusing more on the cultural capital—knowledge or skill acquisition, for example.

While participating because it was directly graded emerged as a more common response for non-FGS, both FGS and non-FGS identified getting assistance or clarification on an assignment as a motive for interacting with a faculty member. FGS and non-FGS alike had a number of reasons in common for choosing to interact with faculty in and out of class. As described previously in this section, the shared reasons mentioned in the interviews were students' hope of furthering their learning or their understanding of a specific assignment, and their desire to receive positive recommendations from the instructor. No connection between these reasons, or the explanations of them, and a student's first-generation status was evident in the questionnaires or interviews.

Faculty-Student Interaction: Encouragements and Impediments

Aside from FGS' relative concern about grades, the motives that students named for interacting with their professors were very similar for FGS and non-FGS. Connected with this, the encouragements and impediments that students identified for initiating or participating in such interactions were similar. Both FGS and non-FGS identified their interest and participation levels, along with their comfort in the classroom and the professor's personality as factors that would make them more or less likely to engage in interactions with faculty.

Interest and Preparation

There was no indication that students' interest level in classes was related to their first-generation status, and students of all backgrounds said that wanting to learn the topic contributed to their engagement in class and with the professor. As FGS Michael noted, he was more likely

to participate in class if “I’m very interested in it.” Similarly, non-FGS Cassie observed that “it all depends on whether I’m really interested in it.” Non-FGS Flaire, talking about students who did not participate, said that the reason for a lack of participation was that “they just don’t care. I know a lot of people who just don’t care. That’s one of the problems of our generation, there are a lot of people who just don’t care.” This, he suggested, was the reason that others did not engage with their professors or with the other students in class. He, however, did not believe that he himself fit into this category.

Flaire also thought that students would not participate if they were not prepared for class. Philip supported this assumption, suggesting that his participation depended “on the question,...on what the topic is, how much information I have on the topic.” Renee identified a similar impediment to interacting in class: “[I]f I’m super, super lost in the subject, I don’t want to say anything because I don’t know what I’m talking about, so I’ll kind of just sit there and try to write everything down.” None of these encouragements or impediments, relating to student interest or preparation, seemed connected to a student’s first-generation status.

Comfort Among Classmates

“[I]f I feel like people are looking at me or rolling their eyes, I am a little less likely to say something.” (FGS Toni)

“I have to feel secure in a classroom.” (Non-FGS Rose)

Surprisingly, a student’s sense of comfort in a class did not seem to correlate strongly with first-generation status, although this might reflect that all of the students in the study had a similar level of academic preparation prior to high school, and that comfort in class may be primarily correlated with feeling as academically prepared as other students. When talking about

comfort in class, students were most frequently aware of their peers, while professors were not mentioned or were brought up secondarily.

Flaire, a non-FGS who identified as very outgoing, thought that other students might not participate in class because they were shy. However, only one student, non-FGS Philip, suggested that his shyness was a reason for not being very active in class: “At times I know the answer or what to say, but I don’t put myself into the position to put myself on the stage, even though I know the correct response to it. Most cases, I try to, but I’m kind of a shy person, so I don’t talk much.”

Though non-FGS LeeAnne did not specifically identify herself as shy, a lack of confidence was apparent in her response: “If there’s a lot of people in the class, I feel intimidated—like what if I say something and they think I’m, like, stupid or that it’s a dumb question? So the bigger the class the more I’m less likely to participate.” LeeAnne identified herself as “self-conscious” and said that her participation was hindered by her concern that other students would think she was “ditzy,” but also said that being in small classes “builds up your confidence,” recognizing that “you need confidence if you’re going to participate in class.”

Cassie, also a non-FGS, identified the potentially negative reaction of her classmates as a reason for participating less, particularly in a class that was too small: “If there's only, like, four or five people in the class, I probably won’t want to share as much. Because then it's kind of, they kind of look at you, like, why are you thinking that?” Renee, a FGS, similarly described how certain class dynamics could inhibit her participation: “If I don’t like a lot of people around me, if I know that they’re going to judge me for what I say, then I’m just going to sit there and take notes on what other people say. I know I shouldn’t, but I still care about what other people think.” Another FGS, Toni, expressed a very similar scenario and response: “I’m kind of super

aware of how people are reacting when I'm asking questions. So if I feel like people are looking at me or rolling their eyes, I am a little less likely to say something." While these responses make it clear that students are concerned with being comfortable in class, and that their level of participation may be dependent on that comfort, there was no evidence that the comfort was tied to students' FGS status.

Rose, a non-FGS who described herself as very talkative in class, expressed mixed ideas about the importance of being comfortable in a class. Initially, she was adamant that "I have to feel secure in a classroom," but then added, "I don't think I've ever felt not secure." Later, she noted that "if a classroom has anything but a comfortable feel, if I feel I'm going to be criticized for something I'm saying, most of the time, I'll say it anyway but sometimes that'll restrict my thought processes, because I'll just be, like, it's not worth it to say it out loud and it'll start a fight." Like other students, Rose was aware of the classroom dynamic and possibly influenced by it.

In various ways, all of these students acknowledged that an uninviting or uncomfortable class could hinder their participation. This finding, while not surprising, underscores the role that classroom dynamic played in students' participation. It also brings up the idea that, though students' habitus is shaped by their early childhood experiences, in the field of the classroom, relevant aspects of FGS' habitus may be similar to those same aspects for non-FGS. College students, after all, have spent years in school classrooms, interacting with one another; this is a familiar field, and one in which they have a great deal of experience.

In contrast, when students interact one-on-one with professors, they call upon a different aspect of their habitus than they do when they are in class. This former aspect of habitus, interacting one-on-one, is something that non-FGS have more experience with, which would

likely lead to their having more comfort with it. Meanwhile, the two groups have similar experiences in the classroom, which may partly explain why students' answers about in-class participation do not differ much between FGS and non-FGS.

While students might think of in-class participation as being primarily about interacting with peers, the professor almost always plays a role, as participant or as facilitator. Thus, in-class discussion is one kind of faculty-student interaction. In addition, such in-class interactions might facilitate later communication between professor and student, since they could make professors seem more engaged or approachable, which was a factor brought up by a number of students.

Professor Personality

“[I]f I think they’re a nice professor, or someone you could go to to talk to about your problem or your project or your assignment, I’d be more likely to talk to them.” (Non-FGS Cassie)

“[I]f I ask a question and then it’s like a conversation almost...generally, that’s the way I prefer... then I’m much more likely to speak out.” (FGS Toni)

Students across the first-generation spectrum expressed concern that some professors “really do not want to be bothered” (Mary Lou) by their students, and said that they would be less likely to interact with a professor who conveyed this attitude. Renee, for example, said, “If they’re super mean or detached, I don’t think I’d want to try to get to know them outside class, because I would be thinking that they would act the same way.” Toni’s attitude was similar: “If I ask the teacher a question and they give me a very short answer, I’m probably not going to keep asking questions, but if I ask a question and then it’s like a conversation almost...generally, that’s the way I prefer... then I’m much more likely to speak out.” All of these FGS were clear

that they would be unlikely to want further interactions with professors who did not seem approachable.

Cassie and LeeAnne, both non-FGS, also identified the professor's personality as a potential hindrance. LeeAnne thought she would be less likely to go to a professor who was "really strict or stern," while Cassie was concerned with a professor's reaction to her personally:

I guess it's just how I think they are as a person. Like, if I think they're a nice professor, or someone you could go to to talk to about your problem or your project or your assignment, I'd be more likely to talk to them. But if, like, I see them and it's kind of really hard, and they're, like, "Just do your work," then I'd probably be kind of apprehensive to go to office hours because I'd feel like they'd just give me this look, like, "I told you to do your work. Just do what I told you to do. Why are you asking questions?"

First-generation college student Cristina, similarly, looked for cues from her professors to determine whether they would want to interact with her. Though she had just started her first two college classes, her experiences in high school had informed her expectations. She said that she would limit communication with faculty members who were "standoffish and very strict" about when or how students could contact them. She also identified a much more general aspect of a professor's personality as a factor in whether she would seek out interactions with them. She said she would be likely to engage more with them "if you can tell that they enjoy what they do. Because if a teacher doesn't enjoy teaching you can tell as a student. It's really difficult to get to know a teacher if they don't love what they do." All of these students suggested that a professor's personality and comportment in class would influence whether they would participate.

There were a variety of related traits that students identified as impediments or encouragements to faculty-student interaction. Kory, a non-FGS, was clear that a professor has to seem like he/she was open to questions. If they were not, she explained, “I won’t interact or, like, engage... because I don’t want to be shut down for asking for help. That’s one thing I’m really scared about.”

Michael, a FGS, identified a very specific aspect of an instructor’s personality as an impediment to communication: “how overbearing they were.” Non-FGS Rose, meanwhile, said that “one of the biggest things for me is that the teacher has to be welcoming. I cannot, I mean, if the teacher seems closed off to me or if the teacher seems like he doesn’t care or he or she doesn’t care, I’ll immediately shield down.”

While both FGS and non-FGS brought up professors’ personality traits and attitudes as encouragements or impediments to interaction, FGS’ attitudes were a little different. As discussed earlier, FGS seemed more likely to worry about a professor being “mean” or “scary,” which may be a reflection of FGS’ unfamiliarity with the habitus expected in college, by student or by professor. This was illustrated by Mary Lou, who was surprised to find her college professors to be welcoming, because that had not been her expectation: “I think it’s different from what I expected because, like, you see college portrayed in the media and there’s usually the professor that hates everybody and seems to hate his job and is only here for research and to get grants, and so that’s the perception I had coming in, that all professors were going to be like that.”

Because their assumptions about professors when they first come into college may differ from non-FGS’, FGS’ perceptions of when a professor does not want to be bothered by students may not be the same, either. Perhaps displaying comfort with the new field of college, non-FGS

were much more specific about the ways in which faculty-student interaction might take place, and the ways in which the professors might indicate a desire not to engage with students. For example, Kory, a non-FGS, described a specific plan to see whether a professor was approachable. She said that she would email a professor with a question as a “test-run,” and from his/her response, determine whether the professor was approachable. In contrast, many FGS in the study, including Mary Lou, Jessica, Michael and Renee, were more likely to focus on an immediate perception of a professor’s being “overbearing,” “mean,” or wanting to have nothing to do with students. This might be informed in part by past experience with teachers, or by incomplete information on the role that professors play, or the ways a “typical” professor might regard or interact with students.

While the professor’s personality and regard for the student are mentioned as factors that made both FGS and non-FGS more or less likely to interact with their faculty members, an unspoken difference may be present: Since FGS may be more likely to perceive their professors as unapproachable or even, as Mary Lou described, “mean,” these students’ determination of whether a professor does not want to be bothered by them may differ from non-FGS’. This in turn might reflect non-FGS’ relative comfort with this field, and their confidence in the effectiveness of their habitus. Thus, though FGS and non-FGS similarly described the encouragements and impediments to interacting with faculty, these encouragements and impediments might be colored by students’ perceptions of faculty and their understanding of the expected habitus and the field.

Conclusion

In this study, all students expressed an intention to meet their professors' expectations and to show them respect. Students' concepts of respect varied in connection with their parents' educational level, and their view of faculty differed significantly based on their first-generation status: Non-FGS tended to view faculty as current or future equals, while FGS spoke of them as socially at a different level.

Non-FGS' perceptions of college were directly and indirectly influenced by their parents' advice and attitudes towards college, though non-FGS were often not aware of this influence, or of the cultural capital that their families imparted. FGS, meanwhile, formed their perceptions of college and professors based largely on other sources, including peers, teachers, and media. They often sought additional information through social networks that included older peers and acquaintances through a family business.

FGS and non-FGS participants identified similar motives for interacting with professors: interest in learning, exchanging ideas, gaining a better understanding of an assignment or concept, and receiving positive letters of recommendation. They named similar encouragements for interacting with faculty in and out of class, including their interest in the topic, their preparation for the class, their comfort among their classmates, and the professor's personality. However, based on their perceptions of professors, it is possible that the FGS in this study were less likely than non-FGS to see professors as welcoming.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The goal of this study is to better understand students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction and the origins of those perceptions, with a focus on possible differences between FGS and non-FGS. The three steps of the research process—questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups—allowed a clearer understanding of these topics to emerge.

In this overview, I will discuss the first research question (How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?) and its subquestions, then discuss the second research question (What is the origin of FGS and non-FGS perceptions of faculty-student interaction?) and its subquestions.

Research Questions

1. How do FGS and non-FGS perceive faculty-student interaction?
 - a. How do FGS and non-FGS gauge the importance of interacting with faculty in ensuring college student success?
 - b. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as encouragements to interacting with faculty?
 - c. What do FGS and non-FGS identify as impediments to interacting with faculty?
 - d. How does first-generation status relate to the encouragements or impediments that students identify?

- e. Do FGS and non-FGS perceptions of faculty-student interaction change during their first semester, and if so, how?
2. What is the origin of FGS and non-FGS perceptions of faculty-student interaction?
- c. What roles, if any, do students' social and cultural capital play in producing encouragements and impediments to faculty-student interaction?
 - d. How does FGS status relate to the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction?

Summary of Findings: FGS' and non-FGS' Perceptions of Faculty-Student Interaction

In certain ways, FGS and non-FGS in this study perceived faculty-student interaction similarly. No students mentioned it on the questionnaire, suggesting that they did not consider it central to student success, at least not consciously. However, in the interviews, students from both groups considered interaction with faculty to be important, and expected that it was something they would do in college. Even though the interviews took place during the second, third, and fourth weeks of the students' first term in college, most students—again, both FGS and non-FGS—had already engaged in some kind of faculty-student interaction in college.

The students overlapped in the encouragements and impediments to interacting with faculty that they identified. The encouragements and impediments that students named related to their interest in the subject and preparation for class, their comfort among their classmates, and their professors' personalities. Students of different parental education backgrounds also named similar motives for interacting with faculty: These included the desire to learn, share their opinions, understand assignments, and obtain good recommendation letters in the future. The groups did differ slightly in one motive: FGS were more likely to mention a participation grade as a motive for participating in class than were non-FGS.

Students of all FGS statuses mentioned wanting to meet their professors' expectations when it came to different types of interactions, and in conjunction with this, students brought up the importance of respect towards faculty. Non-FGS did perceive faculty differently than FGS in regard to their own social positions in contrast to their professors': Non-FGS' responses suggested that they saw themselves as current or future equals to professors, while FGS—particularly those whose parents had no college experience—indicated feeling more distance, or being more intimidated by professors.

Over the course of the first semester of college, FGS, particularly those whose parents had no college experience, were more likely to change their perceptions of faculty and of faculty-student interaction, a change that brought them more in line with their non-FGS peers. Though it would be difficult to support the idea that these students' habitus had changed, it was apparent that their cultural capital—their awareness not just of the importance of interacting with faculty but also of how to initiate or participate in these interactions—had changed.

Summary of Findings: Origins of Students' Perceptions of Faculty-Student Interaction

Examining the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction, substantial differences emerged. Non-FGS in the study described being highly influenced by their parents' advice and cultural capital. To a lesser extent, they also mentioned the ways in which their parents' own college experience had served as models. Some non-FGS received specific advice about interacting with faculty from their parents, and all non-FGS described pertinent advice about college life—both academic and social—that they received from their parents. Non-FGS also were more likely to recall ways in which their parents' knowledge of college and professional life—cultural capital tied to their parents' educational level—influenced aspects of their perceptions of faculty-student interaction. For example, many college-educated parents

advised their children about the importance of social networking. Non-FGS were also more frequently exposed in personal and familiar settings to teachers and other school professionals, who were a part of their parents' social capital—as family friends or family members.

In certain ways, FGS utilized their social capital to inform themselves about college and faculty-student interaction more—though certainly differently—than did their non-FGS peers. For example, they sought advice from people whom they knew through their family's business, as well as from teachers at school, peers, and even college tour guides. They also relied more heavily on their teachers' advice and modeling. In regard to accessing social networks, non-FGS whose parents attended college in another country more resembled their FGS peers than they resembled non-FGS whose parents' college experience took place in the U.S.

There were also elements of students' upbringing, unrelated to parental education level, that helped FGS in particular acquire cultural capital that made them more comfortable interacting with faculty. These elements included being given a lot of independence, resulting in self-sufficiency early in life; being taught to ask questions and be inquisitive; and growing up in a small town, where interaction between adult professionals and children was relatively frequent and informal.

Interpretation of Findings Within Existing Body of Research

One of the most difficult aspects of researching FGS is that the definition of “first-generation college student” is variable, as discussed earlier. Most commonly, an FGS is defined as a student whose parents do not have four-year degrees. At times, however, an FGS is considered to be a student whose parents have no college experience. An examination of quantitative data suggests that the definition could make a significant difference in the findings,

or in the interpretation or application of the findings, as there were measurable differences in the experiences of students whose parents had different levels of education. It was for this reason that I chose to include different levels of parental education on my initial survey, allowing students to indicate how much education each parent had obtained. The findings from my study confirm that the definition of FGS could make a substantial difference, as, in some areas of my research, FGS whose parents had no college experience expressed very different views from FGS whose parents had some college experience. For example, students whose parents had some college experience often spoke similarly to non-FGS (students whose parents had graduated from college with a four-year degree) in regard to perceptions of faculty, while students whose parents had no college experience described very different perceptions of faculty at the beginning of their college career. Thus, in this instance, FGS whose parents had left college before obtaining a four-year degree, or who had received only a two-year degree, were more like their non-FGS peers, rather than like the FGS whose parents had not attended college at all.

While some of the existing research literature includes different levels of FGS status, most studies divide students into the categories of FGS and non-FGS without further distinction or specificity. Knowing the definition used in any particular study is crucial, and many studies could provide more useful information if they included multiple levels of FGS. Using the example from my study above, for instance, a program with the goal of helping students feel more comfortable with their professors might not be as applicable to FGS whose parents had some college experience, but it could be very helpful to FGS whose parents had no college experience. Most of the data gathered by the National Center for Educational Statistics includes multiple levels of FGS. For example, the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS: 04/09), which is discussed in my literature review, and which informed the design of my study, has nine

categories of parental education level, five of which would put students into the category of “FGS”: “Did not complete high school,” “High school diploma or equivalent,” “Vocational or technical training,” “Less than two years college,” “Associate’s degree,” and “Two or more years of college but no degree.” In contrast to this, the vast majority of studies that do not rely on NCES databases, and even many that do, employ only two categories: FGS and non-FGS, with the definition of FGS dependent on the particular study.

Faculty-Student Interaction

A number of quantitative studies and surveys indicate that FGS are less likely to interact with faculty than are their non-FGS peers. For example, Soria and Stebleton (2012), using the Student Experience in the Research University survey of almost 2000 first-year students, report that FGS are less likely to participate in discussions or to ask questions in class. Based on the Collegiate Learning Assessment Longitudinal Project (CLE), Arum and Roksa (2012) find that FGS are less likely to meet with professors, and the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS: 04/09) longitudinal study demonstrates that FGS talk to faculty outside of class and meet with them less frequently than do non-FGS. Relying on the larger but older 1992 National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), Terenzini et al (1996) also find that FGS are less likely than their non-FGS peers to perceive faculty as being concerned about their students’ development.

The finding that FGS are less likely to engage in faculty-student interaction is further explored in qualitative studies, including Collier and Morgan (2008), Cox (2011), Davis (2010) and Wang (2013). These studies find that FGS tend to be less comfortable with faculty and less sure of how to interact with them, though often students express a desire to engage in interactions with their professors. Cox (2011) and Wang (2013) both find that, in interviews, students report beneficial outcomes when they do interact with professors.

My study sought to add to this discussion by exploring whether FGS did in fact feel less comfortable interacting with faculty, and if so, why. Overall, it seemed that FGS in the study were relatively unsure of how these interactions would take place, though they expressed a similar level of willingness. Compared to non-FGS, FGS also expressed less comfort with the idea of informally interacting with their professors. Because the interviews in my study took place at the very beginning of the students' college experience, the focus was on perceptions, rather than experiences. However, even in the first few weeks of classes, students had had some interactions with their instructors, and these interactions had already influenced their perceptions. In the context of this study, in which students were participating in a summer program and taking both a small class with faculty who employed a learner-centered pedagogy, and a larger lecture-style class, the formal and informal exchanges with professors had made the students feel more aware of and comfortable with the idea of faculty-student interaction.

Capital, Habitus, and Field

In many ways, the findings of this study echo those of researchers who employed a Bourdieuan lens in their analyses, though in small ways, differences emerged. These differences might be due to the variations in the studied populations, the study design, or the focus of the research.

Discussing school-age children, Dumais (2002) finds that students from a lower SES background do not fit into the school environment as well as their higher SES peers do, which she attributes to lower-SES students not having the capital necessary to fit easily into this environment. She asserts that students are assumed to know the expected capital and habitus, but are never explicitly taught either in school. Because habitus and cultural capital are both absorbed and inculcated from childhood, and since first-generation status correlates with SES, it

is feasible that these findings would apply to the college students in my study, as well. To an extent, they did apply, as FGS often described and displayed a different habitus in regard to student-faculty interaction. However, the focus groups revealed that students demonstrated an ability to acquire cultural capital and possibly begin to alter aspects of habitus over their first months of college. This acquired capital and awareness of habitus appeared to be a result of personal experience with faculty-student interactions, possibly also influenced by these FGS' observations of other students' interactions with faculty.

In one of the only studies to use a Bourdieuan lens specifically when looking at FGS in college, Soria and Stebleton (2012) assert that FGS' "lack" (p. 675) of capital hinders them in regard to interaction with faculty, and that this in turn negatively influences their engagement and, ultimately, their retention in college. My study employs the Bourdieuan lens differently, finding that, though FGS' capital might be different and might result in a different perception of faculty-student interaction, it is not necessarily a deficit. In fact, in contrast to Soria and Stebleton's (2012) suggestion, I found that FGS were more likely to take advantage of their social capital in order to learn about college and to shape their perceptions of faculty-student interaction. My study did not address other aspects of student engagement or retention.

Quantitative studies of the impact of first-generation status on faculty-student interaction tend to measure this interaction based on the frequency of visits to office hours or on the number of questions asked or answered in class. While this is a useful set of statistics to have and use, the interviews in my study indicated that student comfort with faculty was not necessarily directly correlated with the amount of interaction that they intended to have with faculty. (It was not possible for me to determine whether intended interaction with faculty equated with actual interaction with faculty, since the study's interviews took place so early in students' college

careers, and because observations of faculty-student interactions were not part of the study design.) Thus, research examining FGS' comfort with faculty could uncover different information than the current quantitative studies, which assess the number of interactions. This distinction between comfort and frequency of interactions matters because a student's comfort might affect the interactions and impact the benefits that he or she receives or perceives from such encounters with faculty.

Related to this, FGS' self-reliance may have benefitted them in their journey to college, as it likely contributed to their competence, confidence and self-motivation. The development of these characteristics emerged in my interviews with each of the FGS whose parents had no college experience. Davis (2010) suggests that such self-reliance may have academically negative consequences, in that it might make students reluctant to seek help from faculty. While this may be the case, my study indicated that it could also help FGS be able—and recognize the need—to access their available resources if problems arise. Based on my study, it is impossible to determine with certainty whether Davis' (2010) assertion is correct: The FGS in my study did not express a reluctance to interact with faculty based on factors or concerns relating to self-reliance, though they did indicate more hesitance in faculty-student interactions. However, it appears more likely that this reticence was based on uncertainty and discomfort with the idea of interacting with faculty, rather than on students' not wanting to ask for help.

Although the capital that FGS brought with them to college benefitted and will continue to benefit them in many ways, there are other ways in which it might not be beneficial; specifically, it may hinder their interaction with faculty, which could put them at a disadvantage in college. For example, while FGS' self-sufficiency and demonstrated ability to overcome adversity, traits which were evident in the interviews, could make them more resilient when

faced with adversity, their relative discomfort with faculty could make them less likely to seek help if they were struggling in a class or in the college environment. For this reason, the recommendations made by many researchers, myself included, to help FGS become more informed about and comfortable with faculty-student interaction remain important.

Tinto (1993) focuses strongly on the value of student comfort in the college environment. He suggests that certain elements of cultural and social capital—though he does not employ that terminology or, explicitly, a Bourdieuan lens—directly affect students’ perseverance in college. These elements, which include whether a student feels connected to the university and specifically to the people on campus, are applicable to all students. FGS might be more at risk of lacking this sense of connectedness, however, if the field is unfamiliar and if the social or cultural capital that the student brings with himself/herself does not feel relevant, useful, or appreciated. Thus, Tinto’s (1993) recommendations regarding the importance of helping students create this sense of connectedness apply to the findings of my study. Elaboration on this can be found in the following section, “Implications for Professional Practice.”

The prior research done about faculty-student interaction and FGS helped inform this study. The aforementioned quantitative studies highlighted that, compared to non-FGS, FGS interacted less with faculty. Meanwhile, qualitative studies illuminated differences in actions and motivations regarding these interactions. My study used this research as a context to examine students’ perceptions of faculty-student interaction, and to explore whether a difference in perceptions between FGS and non-FGS led to the differences in intentions and actions reported in the quantitative studies.

Implications for Theory

My study employs a Bourdieuan lens to interpret the origins of students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction, and the students' expectations and actions resulting from these perceptions. Bourdieu's theoretically-informed focus on education is much broader than mine. He examines how habitus and cultural capital are essential elements in the reproduction of the dominant social structure. He considers the link between an individual's social class by birth, the class the individual ultimately achieves, and the impact of education on this trajectory. According to Bourdieu, being successful in the educational system requires the cultural capital and habitus of the higher classes, but the educational system does not help students to acquire this capital or habitus. Instead, students bring the capital and habitus of their families, which can hinder their success in a system that expects something different. In his own words:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 73).

In this study, I applied aspects of the concepts of cultural capital and habitus to a specific realm: faculty-student interaction. This application has implications that relate to Bourdieu's theories of education and reproduction, but they are only tangentially connected to his focus. Another way in which this study differs from Bourdieu's main theories is that Bourdieu focuses on social class, while this study uses parents' educational attainment to categorize students. Though social class and educational attainment are correlated, they are not interchangeable.

Educational attainment, according to Bourdieu's theory, is an example of cultural capital (or symbolic capital), but is not identical.

Taking into account those differences, my study nonetheless fits into the Bourdieuan theoretical framework and body of research. The findings of the study illustrate many of the pillars of Bourdieuan scholarship, including the durability of habitus, the influence of cultural capital, and the relationship between field and habitus.

According to Bourdieu, habitus is considered to be inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable (Thompson, 2003, p. 12); these dispositions are reflected in the findings of my study. Specifically, I found that the perceptions and actions of FGS and non-FGS regarding faculty-student interaction were "relatively homogenous across individuals from similar backgrounds" (Thompson, 2003, pp. 12-13), an indicator of their structured nature. Participants' responses about the origins of their perceptions illustrated that their habitus was inculcated. The generative quality of habitus, its ability to produce additional "practices and perceptions" (Thompson, 2003, p. 13), was evident in students' changing application of habitus over the course of their transition from high school to university. The transposable nature of habitus was evident in the fact that students, in a new environment with new expectations and people, nonetheless applied their habitus to this previously unfamiliar field.

While habitus appeared to have durability, the short time span of my study precluded my ability to determine whether habitus is as durable as Bourdieu indicates. Some participants did display adjustments to their habitus, or at least described their comfort with professors differently, over the course of the first few months of college. For example, in the focus group, Mary Lou described a change in her own habitus as a result of her participation in Summer Academy: "What influenced me the most was interactions with [Summer Academy] professors,

which led to how we interact with college professors during the actual fall semester.” This change corresponds with the interpretation of Webb et al. (2008), who assert that habitus is not immutable. They suggest that it can shift if such a change results in improving a situation, or as a result of gained cultural capital. Thompson (2003), meanwhile, asserts that people rarely act as a result of the “outcome of a conscious deliberation or calculation” (p. 16) and that habitus is “not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification” (p. 13). In the focus group, Mary Lou did not indicate awareness of the change in her perceptions of professors, or in her apparent comfort with them. While I sensed a significant change in her interactions with me, my study relied on students’ own descriptions of their habitus and interactions with faculty, so I cannot be sure whether or how Mary Lou’s—or any student’s—habitus changed over the course of the study.

With the small sample size of this study and the relatively short span of time studied, it is difficult to say whether habitus significantly changed for some participants, or whether only their words had changed, possibly reflecting something different than a change in habitus. For example, Mary Lou’s change might demonstrate that she is code switching, and is responding differently to similar questions, depending on the audience. That seems like a plausible explanation here, as, in this case, the focus group provided a different audience than Mary Lou had in her individual interview, and it is possible that Mary Lou, surrounded by non-FGS peers in the focus group, might have had different answers, or might have presented those answers differently, than would have been the case in an individual interview or in a focus group with other FGS.

In the individual interviews and, to a larger extent, on the questionnaires, it was apparent that the field of college was new for FGS, in a way that it was not new for non-FGS. A

disconnect between habitus and field generally results in an individual's discomfort and/or uncertainty about expected behavior. Comparing FGS and non-FGS, it makes sense that FGS, who came to college unfamiliar with the field and with a habitus that developed in an environment more removed from college, would have felt more initial discomfort in the new field, and specifically interacting with faculty. As the students became more familiar with the field, particularly if they found that their habitus was not as inapplicable as they had anticipated, their comfort would have been likely to increase. This seemed to be the case to some extent for all FGS, but most strongly for Mary Lou.

Certainly, Thompson's (2003) suggestion that a mismatch in habitus and field can lead a student to be "literally...lost for words" (p. 17), as illustrated by FGS' greater reticence to engage with faculty, seems applicable. This was more evident in the individual interviews, at the very beginning of students' college experience, when FGS expressed a great deal of reluctance or uncertainty about how to engage with professors outside of class, than it was in the focus groups nearly a full semester later. Again, given all students' growing familiarity with the field of the university, this shift is not surprising.

Habitus and cultural capital are complex concepts, and Bourdieu is interpreted and employed differently by different researchers, as demonstrated above. They do, however, share the notion that people are not aware of their habitus or cultural capital. A lack of awareness of one's own habitus or cultural capital was evident in my study, in which participants' words indicated that they believed they possessed a different habitus or cultural capital than their actions suggested, a phenomenon Philipsen (1999) called "contradiction between values-spoken and values-lived." This was perhaps most apparent in the way that non-FGS frequently claimed that their parents had not influenced them with regard to their perceptions of college, while their

descriptions of the advice they had received, and how they had applied that advice, belied this claim.

The value and influence of cultural capital on students' interactions with faculty were clear. Using Collier and Morgan's (2008) definition of cultural capital in the university context as "preexisting knowledge about interacting successfully in academic settings" (p. 429), one can see that the non-FGS in my study were more likely to possess this kind of cultural capital from the start of their college careers, while the FGS were more likely to develop knowledge and understanding—to acquire capital—over the course of their first months of college. Of course, the acquisition of cultural capital is constant and never complete. While non-FGS may bring more applicable cultural capital with them to college, all students are continually learning more about the field of the university and about how to navigate the field, and are gaining cultural capital during this process. Regarding faculty-student interaction, my individual interviews indicated that non-FGS had more cultural capital that contributed to comfort with faculty than did FGS. The focus groups, a few months later, suggested that student perceptions of faculty-student interaction had changed more for FGS than they had for non-FGS.

Thompson (2003) describes how one kind of capital can be converted to another, such as how a person's symbolic capital—a college degree, for example—can be used to obtain economic capital—a higher income. Although he does not mention social capital among his examples, the study revealed that certain students used their social capital to acquire cultural capital. In particular, FGS and students whose parents went to college in another country and who, as a result, did not possess the same cultural capital, used their social capital in this way. Thus, for some, the effect of the cultural capital that is applicable to faculty-student interaction and which is passed down from parents might not have been as significant, since it appeared that

these students are finding other routes to similarly useful or applicable cultural capital. This may explain why students' motives for seeking faculty-student interaction, as well as the impediments and encouragements that they identified, were very similar across first-generation status.

Implications for Professional Practice

This study produced numerous potentially valuable and applicable implications for professional practice. Perhaps the most significant implication is tied to one of the study's limitations: All of the participants were enrolled in Summer Academy, a self-selecting, intensive program designed to introduce incoming first-year students to the academic and social aspects of college and to prepare them for their studies in college. The Summer Academy participants were enrolled in two general education college classes, both of which were smaller than typical sections of these courses. The students had regular contact with their instructors outside of class, including in extracurricular activities as varied as whitewater rafting and a cemetery restoration project, as well as in evening study sessions.

The study participants mentioned the Summer Academy program often, particularly in the focus groups, and credited the program, and specifically the instructors of their small classes, with helping them become more comfortable with faculty. While intended primarily to help students adjust to residential life in college and to the academic workload of the university, this experience appeared to help students, particularly FGS, become more comfortable interacting with faculty as well. The findings in this study suggest that incoming university students could benefit from academic programs prior to college that allow them to develop relationships with faculty. A similar benefit might also be achieved through small classes and faculty advising during the first year of college. This is directly supported by Davis (2010), who attributes FGS'

higher attrition rates at large, public four-year colleges in large part to insufficient guidance and to the larger classes at these campuses.

Related to this, the faculty in the Summer Academy program were selected for their ability and interest in interacting with and mentoring first-year students. These faculty members voluntarily participated in the aforementioned extracurricular activities with students, and were invested in the success of their students, both academically and socially. The approachability of such faculty, who were often mentioned by study participants, likely contributed to the growth in students' comfort with faculty. Tinto (1993, first edition 1987) found that “nontraditional” students' (a label used by Tinto that includes first-generation students) participation in organized subcommunities improved outcomes. Though the Summer Academy is not technically a subcommunity, it functioned similarly in that students lived, took classes, studied and participated in extracurricular activities together over the summer, and continued to have some classes together in the fall.

Though the fact that all of the participants in this study were part of a special program is presented as a limitation of the study, it also suggests a potential application for universities: Prioritizing the teaching of first-year students, and exposing students early in their college careers to instructors who are committed to students' academic and social adjustment to college, appears to have the effect of making students more comfortable with faculty. This is particularly pronounced for FGS, whose comfort with faculty is initially lower, but—according to my findings—seems to increase at a greater rate than it does for their non-FGS peers.

Stephens et al. (2012) determine that FGS' perception of their college experience is a more accurate predictor of degree completion than it is for non-FGS. In other words, a first-generation college student's satisfaction with his/her overall college experience is more highly

correlated with persistence to degree than is the case for non-FGS. Summer programs such as the one in which these students participated could be a central, positive element in a student's college experience, and a potentially very influential one. Lowery-Hart and Pacheco (2011) suggest that university communities and prospective students are not as informed of bridge programs as they should be, while Engle and Tinto (2008), Terenzini et al. (1996), and McCarron and Inkelas (2006) advocate for more focus on bridge programs and orientations for FGS. Though this was not the direct purpose of the study, ample evidence emerged to conclude that programs such as Summer Academy benefit all students, including FGS, who are more likely to struggle in their adjustment to college.

At the most basic level, increased faculty-student interaction appears to make students—again, particularly FGS, who begin college more reticent of this interaction—more comfortable with faculty-student interaction. Because participation in summer programs is not always feasible, this effect could be promoted through simpler means than a special program. For example, encouraging faculty to invite or require students to attend office hours or individual conferences might produce some of the same benefit for students.

Previous research indicates that faculty-student interaction correlates with improved student outcomes. Kim and Sax (2009) find that it is connected to higher GPA, critical thinking skills and degree aspirations. Endo and Harpel (1982) find that it correlates with students' satisfaction with college. Soria and Stebleton (2012) determine that FGS' increased engagement in the classroom is a predictor of better academic and intellectual outcomes. Though these quantitative studies do not determine causation, qualitative studies such as mine indicate that students want to interact with faculty, and Tinto (1993) asserts that all students benefit socially and academically from more contact with faculty. Helping students become more comfortable

interacting with faculty through opportunity, encouragement, and guidance would be likely to increase students' confidence in these interactions. This, in turn, is likely to increase engagement.

Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest that FGS do not know that they should engage with faculty, nor are they sure of how to interact with them. Similarly, Terenzini et al. (1996) and Soria and Stebleton (2012) determine that FGS not only have less interaction with faculty, but are also less comfortable with faculty, a finding supporting by this qualitative study. Collier and Morgan (2008) uncover this, as well: According to their research, FGS do not know what faculty expect from students, are reticent to consult with their professors to clarify the expectations, and are intimidated by faculty. Collier and Morgan (2008) focus on students later in their college careers, while my study seeks to understand students' perceptions very soon after they have enrolled in college. Having determined that FGS come to college less likely than their non-FGS peers to know how to interact, and more intimidated by faculty, it appears that FGS' struggles, studied by these previous researchers, are a result of the habitus and cultural capital that FGS bring to college, not a result of experiences they have as university students. This finding suggests that providing resources to FGS to help them gain a better understanding of and increased comfort with faculty-student interaction can help them avoid some of the struggles that Collier and Morgan (2008) and Davis (2010) find later in the students' college careers.

Though the participants in my study had very limited college experience at the time of the interviews and even focus groups, they generally seemed to desire interaction with faculty. Taking a qualitative approach, Wang (2013) finds that personal interactions with faculty can be very beneficial to students. According to the research, FGS participants were able to identify ways in which interaction with faculty helped them with major academic and personal

transitions. Wang's findings strengthen my proposal that all students—and especially FGS—should be guided and provided opportunity for interacting with faculty. Even though the participants of my study indicated that they would be most likely to interact with faculty in order to clarify assignments or for grade-related reasons, a finding also detailed by Cox (2011), such superficial interactions could potentially lead to deeper relationships, which could influence students' trajectories in school, work, and life.

The FGS in this study suggested that they were less likely than their non-FGS peers to interact with faculty or to imagine closer, more equal, relationships with their professors. Understanding students' perceptions of faculty and the origins of those perceptions, and—perhaps most importantly—being aware of the encouragements and impediments that students identify to faculty-student interaction, could help faculty to be more accessible and approachable and could help students become more comfortable.

In describing their perceptions of college, the participants in my study illustrated how FGS and non-FGS can arrive on a college campus with very different cultural capital. Though this capital might have made FGS less comfortable overall with faculty, FGS also mentioned skills and advice in the interviews that were imparted by their backgrounds that benefitted them in different ways. Though a program like the Summer Academy might benefit FGS more in terms of comfort with faculty-student interaction or familiarity with the field of college, FGS and non-FGS bring different capital to the college experience, and could both benefit from sharing this capital with one another. Thus, integrating FGS and non-FGS, rather than isolating FGS in a separate program (as some colleges do with their summer bridge programs) potentially benefits all students. This corresponds with the assertion by Tierney (1992) that FGS do not benefit from simply being expected or taught to assimilate or by learning how to replace their old cultural

capital with a new set. Rather, Tierney (1992) suggests, FGS should be welcomed on campus, and their capital should be seen as potentially different but also useful, and worthy of sharing. Some of the areas in which FGS and non-FGS differed in my study were connected with FGS' self-sufficiency, a characteristic that likely helped them make it to college. This was evident, for example, in FGS' ability to access their social network and existing cultural capital in order to learn about college. As society and colleges worry about the effects of helicopter parenting on students' resilience (Lythcott-Haims, 2015; Gray, 2015), non-FGS could benefit from exposure to FGS' independence and self-reliance.

Another finding of this study that has implications for student success is that "first generation college student" is a more amorphous category than the literature sometimes suggests. The definition of FGS is variable, and it is easy to see why different researchers might use different definitions: In some ways, students whose parents did not graduate from college are significantly different than students whose parents did graduate from college; in other realms, however, students whose parents had some college experience more resemble those peers whose parents graduated from college, while students whose parents had no college experience at all stand apart from both these groups. Additionally, international and first-generation American students sometimes face the same challenges as FGS.

Although from an administrative perspective it is simplest to label students according to such categories as race, gender, or first-generation college status, this simplification potentially leaves out students who could benefit from certain programs or opportunities. While there is no easy way to solve this problem, perhaps the most practical way to ameliorate the situation it is to make programs and opportunities targeted at FGS and intended to increase their success in college available to a wider range of students. For example, in an effort to promote parental

support and encouragement for FGS, some colleges now provide programs designed to help FGS' parents become more knowledgeable about their children's college experience; such programs could be similarly useful for the parents of non-FGS who did not go to college in the United States and thus are unfamiliar with the American college experience.

Overall, the findings of this study should bring hope to university communities, as they suggest that FGS—and other students who enroll in college and face challenges similar to those that FGS encounter—have willingness, eagerness and resourcefulness that will benefit them tremendously in college. Offered adequate information and support, FGS come to college with crucial tools for success. Notably, the FGS in this study demonstrate how well they have accessed their social capital in order to prepare for college. Having sufficient access to social networks during and especially before college could help more FGS strive for, access, and succeed in college. The participants of this study also illustrate how, with opportunity, FGS can learn skills that are important or crucial for success in college, which they might not have acquired prior to college.

Limitations

This qualitative study explored students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction, the origins of those perceptions, and the reasons that students opted to interact with faculty. As a qualitative study, it is not intended to be generalizable; rather, it seeks to uncover trends and offer possible explanations for phenomena. Ideally, some of the findings are transferable and applicable to other settings.

There are many things that the reader should be aware of in considering the transferability or applicability of this study. First, the participants did not represent many of the

demographic characteristics frequently seen in FGS. All of the participants were traditionally-aged first-year students, and had enrolled at a four-year university. All were full-time students and very few were working off-campus. None had dependents, and all were living on campus. All had been in advanced courses in high school (AP, IB and/or honors), and all had been on a “college prep” track. These characteristics differ from those of a “typical” FGS. Related to this, it is important to remind the reader that the students in this study are the ones who made it to a four-year university, a fact that makes them atypical of children whose parents did not graduate from college overall (Terenzini et al., 1996; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007).

The students were also not representative of first-year students at Urban State University. They had self-selected to participate in Summer Academy, and consequently demonstrated ambition and/or motivation. Though all incoming first-year students were eligible for the program, certain groups of students had been targeted for invitations, including FGS. Although generous financial aid was offered to the participants who qualified, students had to be knowledgeable of how to apply for financial aid for the summer semester, which was a complicated process. Certain students may not have participated in the program as a result of a perceived financial inability to afford it, or because of a lack of knowledge of how to apply for summer financial aid.

The participants were diverse with regard to ethnicity, race, religion and socioeconomic status, though its diversity did not mirror that of the U.S. population or Urban State University populations over all, and white students were underrepresented. Reflecting the fact that there were far more female participants than male in the Summer Academy, the participant sample of this study was overwhelmingly female.

In the Summer Academy, the class size was unusually small, with an average of 14 students in the students' smaller class, and 52 students in their large lecture class. The instructors in the program had been selected based on their commitment to student success and their interest in teaching and mentoring a group of incoming first-year students. The Summer Academy was set up so that instructors interacted with students far more than would be typical for a first-year university student, as they participated alongside students in certain extracurricular and supplemental activities. These features set the participants of this study apart from typical first-year university students, and the interpretations of their responses to interview questions should take these differences into account.

An important limitation to the study was that I was coordinator of the Summer Academy and also a faculty member. Although students in my course were not invited to participate in the study, all students in the program had already met me before the study began, and thus I was a familiar figure, which could have influenced their willingness to participate in the study and their responses. They also knew that I was a faculty member, so their answers about their perceptions of faculty could have been impacted by this. In addition, though I assured participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their answers, the students knew that the faculty members were friendly with one another, so they may have been more reserved in their responses if they feared that what they said might be passed on to their instructors. Although the significance of this limitation was diminished by the fact that the majority of the study was conducted early in the program, before the students knew me well, it nonetheless remains.

A final limitation of this study is that the demographic data were self-reported by the students. While they completed the questionnaire, I overheard two students mentioning that they were not sure about their family income (though only one noted on the questionnaire itself that

she was unsure), and it is possible that students were not accurate in their responses to that question, or possibly even to the question about their parents' educational levels.

Further Research

This study revealed interesting trends that could be studied in more depth by expanding the size or diversity of the study, pursuing quantitative research on an aspect of the study, or focusing on specific subgroups within the population.

The study included 16 participants in the most in-depth phase, the individual interviews. Although these participants came from a broad range of backgrounds, there were certain groups that were underrepresented, which reduced the transferability of the study. For example, Latino students are the first in their family to attend college at a greater rate than other racial and ethnic groups (Terenzini et al., 1996), but there was only one student in the second or third phase of study who identified as Hispanic/Latino. Asian-American students were the largest racial group in the study, comprising six of the sixteen participants. However, their experiences may have been more influenced by their cultural backgrounds than the study was able to explore, especially given that the majority of the Asian-American students had immigrated to the U.S. as children. Examining students'—particularly FGS'—perceptions of faculty-student interaction among specific subgroups such as these could add depth and nuance to our understanding of these students' experiences in college, and their perceptions of faculty-student interaction.

Further research could also be done on the effects of socioeconomic level, siblings, k-12 educational system, or types of classes taken in high school on students' perceptions. Though these were touched on in the questionnaires and interviews, they were not pursued in the depth that a separate study would allow. Socioeconomic level, though a part of the questionnaire, did

not appear to differ significantly among the study participants, and so was not explored. Very few of the participants had older siblings, which meant that the influence of older siblings who already had college experience, particularly on FGS, could not be investigated. The interviews and focus groups also revealed that students were often heavily influenced by their high school teachers. A study focusing specifically on this influence would also be interesting and helpful not only to colleges, but also to high schools and to teacher preparation programs.

This study considered different levels of parental education and grouped students into three categories: FGS whose parents had no college experience at all, FGS whose parents had some college experience but not a four-year degree, and non-FGS (who had at least one parent with a four-year degree). These categories allowed for more comprehensive study than the simple FGS/non-FGS dichotomy would, but they still were insufficient for complete understanding of how parental education level affected students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction. This leads to one area of possible additional research: conducting a similar study with a greater number of participants, thus allowing for an increased range of FGS categories. For example, non-FGS whose parents had only a four-year degree might have different experiences than a non-FGS whose parents had graduate degrees; similarly, FGS whose parents had a two-year degree might have different perspectives than FGS whose parents took only a few classes in college.

Related to these possible groupings, the definition of FGS could be further examined. As mentioned earlier, the definition varies; even if it were standardized, however, it would still be insufficient. One of the FGS, Mary Lou illustrated this problem in the focus group, when she mentioned that she does not really know whether or not to label herself an FGS. She was raised by her mother, who had not attended college; her father, however, who died when she was a

baby, had a college degree. She felt that, technically, she was a non-FGS, but realistically, her experiences more resembled those of a FGS. (For the purposes of this study, I categorized Mary Lou as a FGS, since my questionnaire was designed to consider the educational level of the parent(s) or guardian(s) who were primary in the student's upbringing.)

Employing the Bourdieuan lens, a longitudinal study could reveal more about whether and how students' cultural capital and habitus change over the course of college, as students adjusted to the new field of the university. While my study suggested that even a few months can alter students' perceptions and behaviors, a longer-term study could investigate the development or permanence of those changes.

There are many areas in which quantitative or mixed-methods research could illuminate the relationships between and among variables. For example, students' perceived comfort with professors and their perceptions of professors as equals or as "superiors" could be examined and quantitatively evaluated alongside the traditional measures of academic success (GPA and degree completion). Though similar quantitative studies have been done using the frequency with which students interact with professors as one variable, this study revealed that frequency of interaction and comfort with these interactions were not always necessarily interchangeable.

As colleges turn their focus on recruitment and retention in the direction of FGS, a broader and deeper understanding of these students' experiences, challenges, and successes will benefit both the institutions and the students. There are many aspects of this study that could be taken in directions either broader or deeper. As faculty work to connect with FGS and to facilitate their success in college, having an increased understanding of FGS' perceptions of their professors, and how those perceptions differ from their non-FGS peers', will offer faculty

practical tools to make those relationships better and easier for all. This, in turn, would likely positively impact FGS' success in college.

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Appendix A

Instrument #1: Questionnaire

Completion of this questionnaire is completely voluntary. If you choose to do it, you can return it to Micol Hutchison in 5111 Harris Hall when you have finished filling it out.

Part I:

1. Name (first and last):
 - a. ID number [leave blank]:
2. Today's date:

Part II: Please answer the following questions. There is no word count minimum or maximum. If you need more space, you can use the back of this page.

3. What does it take to be successful in college? What behaviors does a successful student exhibit? What attitudes does he or she have?
4. What challenges do you expect in college?

5. In what ways do you expect to be successful in college?

Part III: Please answer the following questions.

6. Age (as of today):

7. Gender:

8. Race:

9. Language(s) spoken at home:

10. Please select the category that you think best describes your family's household income.

- a. Less than \$20,000 per year
- b. \$20,001-\$40,000 per year
- c. \$40,001 to \$60,000 per year
- d. \$60,001 to \$100,000 per year
- e. More than \$100,000 per year

11. Questions 11a-11d ask you to indicate the highest level of education obtained by your primary parent(s) or guardian(s). You should include all parent(s) or guardian(s) whom you consider to be your primary caregivers growing up. In the blanks, please write which parent you are referring to (for example, mother or father or stepmother).

11a) Parent/guardian #1 _____:

mother, father, stepmother, grandfather, etc.

- Did not complete high school
- Completed high school/GED
- Some college
- 2-year degree (*e.g.* Associate's degree)
- 4-year degree (*e.g.* Bachelor's degree)
- Education beyond 4-year degree (*e.g.* Master's degree, J.D., M.D., Ph.D.)

11b) Parent/guardian #2 (if applicable) _____:

mother, father, stepmother, grandfather, etc.

- Did not complete high school
- Completed high school/GED
- Some college
- 2-year degree (*e.g.* Associate's degree)
- 4-year degree (*e.g.* Bachelor's degree)
- Education beyond 4-year degree (*e.g.* Master's degree, J.D., M.D., Ph.D.)

11c) Parent/guardian #3 (if applicable) _____:
mother, father, stepmother, grandfather, etc.

- Did not complete high school
- Completed high school/GED
- Some college
- 2-year degree (*e.g.* Associate's degree)
- 4-year degree (*e.g.* Bachelor's degree)
- Education beyond 4-year degree (*e.g.* Master's degree, J.D., M.D., Ph.D.)

11d) Parent/guardian #4 (if applicable) _____:
mother, father, stepmother, grandfather, etc.

- Did not complete high school
- Completed high school/GED
- Some college
- 2-year degree (*e.g.* Associate's degree)
- 4-year degree (*e.g.* Bachelor's degree)
- Education beyond 4-year degree (*e.g.* Master's degree, J.D., M.D., Ph.D.)

Part IV: Up to 20 students who complete this questionnaire will be invited to participate in a follow-up interview. The invitation to participate in the interview will be sent to you by email and/or text message. If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please include your contact information below:

- Email: _____
- Cell phone number: _____

Do you agree to receive an interview invitation or reminder via text message?

- yes
- no

Instrument #2: Interview

1. In the questionnaire that you completed earlier this term, you described successful college students as _____. Is there anything you'd add to that or change about it?
2. What messages have you received about what it takes to be a successful college student? Where do these messages come from?
3. Tell me more about the challenges to being a successful college student. Which ones do you expect to face? Probe: What are the reasons for these challenges? Is there preparation for college you think you lack and wish you had had? How do you think you'll deal with those challenges?
4. Tell me more about the strengths you bring to being a college student.
5. Where do these strengths come from?
6. How would you describe your in-class participation? Has it changed over the course of your first few weeks of college?
7. What factors made you more likely to participate in class?
8. What factors made you less likely to participate in class?
9. In what ways do you think your upbringing or your family might have shaped how or how much you participated in class?
10. How would you describe your interaction with your professors or instructors outside of class? Has it been similar to what you expected? Probes: Have you gone to their office hours? If not, how come? If yes, what was that like? Are you in e-mail contact? Tell me about that. Do you see them on campus? If yes, tell me about those interactions.
11. What factors made you more or less likely to interact with your professors or instructors?
12. In what ways do you think your upbringing or your family might have influenced how or how much you interacted with your professors or instructors outside of class?
13. Is there preparation for college you think you lack and wish you had had? What are the reasons for these challenges?
14. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to add?

Instrument #3: Focus Group Interview

1. How have your perceptions of faculty-student interaction changed since your first day of college at the beginning of summer?
2. How much did interaction with high school teachers influence how you interact with professors in college? Which classes specifically were helpful?
3. How important is it to you personally that your professors like you?
4. What do you know about networking and where do you know it from?
5. How do you know that recommendations are important?

[Show findings from first two stages of study]

6. Do these findings ring true to you? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?
7. Is there anything you think I missed?
8. What can universities do to support interaction with faculty for students, like FGS, who are hesitant to interact? [Probes: What can the institution do? What can individual faculty members do? What can students do?]
9. Do you have any other ideas?

Vita

Micol Veronique Hutchison was born October 7, 1972, in Sharon, Connecticut, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Benson Polytechnic High School in 1990, received a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and Russian from the University of Oregon in 1994, and a Master of Arts in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1997. She has worked at Virginia Commonwealth University since 2000, where she initially taught in the Global Education Office and School of World Studies. Since 2007, she has been a faculty member in the Department of Focused Inquiry.