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Academic Engagement and Institutional Experiences of the Undergraduate Community College Student from Marginalized Communities

Fashawn D. Jones
DePaul University

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DePaul University
College of Education

A Capstone in Education with a Concentration in Education Leadership

Academic Engagement and Institutional
Experiences of the Undergraduate Community
College Student from Marginalized Communities

Fashawn D. Jones
Doctor of Education
June 2020
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CAPSTONE PROJECT: ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE
UNDERGRADUATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT FROM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

I approve the Capstone Project of Fashawn D. Jones.

Barbara Rieckhoff

Barbara Rieckhoff, PhD
DePaul University
Associate Professor
Associate Dean for Curriculum and Programs
Capstone Advisor

5/2/20

Date

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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this capstone project. Any assistance received in the preparation of this capstone has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources used, including data, ideas, and words quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this capstone according to program guidelines, as directed.

Author's Signature Fashawn D. Jones Date 5/2/20

Executive Summary

This study will analyze the kinds of support that undergraduate community college students from marginalized communities need to successfully complete their Associate Degree. The study will examine how student's academic progress is influenced by limitations that result from attending failing high schools. The participants for this study will be between 18-24 years of age. This study seeks to identify factors affecting the successful completion of community college degrees by students from marginalized communities. The study will focus on current community college students who have graduated from high schools serving low income communities. The research will include an analysis of data from seven community college students. Interview topics and questions as well as a review of research on community college degree completion will be the basis for recommendations for institutional resources that may be useful for this student group.

Keywords: resources, degree completion, unprepared, and marginalized communities

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In memorandum of my father and mother, Charlie and Juanita Meeks. Thanks so much for supporting my dreams. I love and miss you, mom and dad!

Academic Engagement and Institutional Experiences of the Undergraduate Community College Student from Marginalized Communities

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of the community college students from marginalized communities. This study discusses the academic engagement challenges that marginalized groups encounter and the techniques that were useful in improving completion rates. The findings from this study will provide a greater understanding of the challenges that community college students face, as well as, identifying programs and services that will better meet the needs of this student group (Gabovitch, 2014). This entire research study, from the writer's perspective, is centered around the analysis of student engagement factors specific to community college students from marginalized communities. Higher education is serving an influx of students who require a formal education to remain in the workforce or to start a new career. This study seeks to help educators better understand the unique needs of marginalized students attending community colleges based on their level of academic engagement (Anderson, 2013).

With the issues that plague students from underserved high schools in higher education institutions such as a lack of quality education, resources and inability to receive college preparation, it is imperative that this group of college students receive academic support to become fully engaged and prepared to learn to be successful in their first year of college (Kuh et al, 2006). This research was necessary in finding out what particular issues this student group faced, how many instances of successful college completion were there, and what services or assistance could be useful in increasing the graduation rate of undergraduate students from marginalized communities.

This study was limited to an investigation of factors that influenced the academic progress of current and former community college students who represented that population. While the study included only seven students, its findings contributed to the general research in this area and personalized the situation and provided individual perspectives. Current research on this issue and on effective responses to the needs of this population will enable community colleges to increase the effective support of students who come to the colleges with hopes and dreams but limited preparation.

The purpose of this study is to acknowledge that some undergraduate college students from marginalized communities have difficulty with attrition towards completing their degree. The problem that this research addresses is that only "30 percent of students who enroll full-time in community college complete an associate degree in three years; and even lower graduation rates apply to part-time minority students" (Rath et al, 2013, p. 3). The term marginalized community encompasses a wide variety of meanings. However, in this study, a marginalized community, as it relates to students, is defined as disenfranchised or underrepresented ethnic or racial minority students in higher education (Sutton & Kemp, 2011). For this study, the term marginalized will

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not be used to refer to the community college student; but the research within the study will be related to students from marginalized communities.

This study will include research on the needs students in community college have and programs that have been organized to respond to those needs. The data collection will provide information on the perceptions of the limitations that students from marginalized communities face in persisting to degree completion. Additionally, this work will contribute to prior research and provide information that was used in continuing that research, as well as identifying programs and strategies that community colleges could consider implementing for students who struggle academically.

Structure of the Study

The structure of this study's report consists of five major sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Recommendations. In addition, an Executive Summary was prepared by the researcher to discuss the highlights of the overall project and the content relating to the Academic Engagement and Institutional Experiences of the Undergraduate Community College Student from Marginalized Communities.

The Introduction provides a comprehensive history of education from the changes in urbanization in the 1920's to culturally relevant academic barriers and successes of the 21st Century for low-income populations. This section also sheds light on the codependent relationship that undergraduate students have with their parents, as it relates to coping skills on campus.

The Literature Review discusses the academic preparation and contrast between Generation Z and Millennials students. This section provides an analysis concerning the young age of computer literacy that Millennial students acquired in comparison to Generation Z students in academia. This section also provides a detailed account of the factors contributing to lessened cognitive abilities for children from marginalized communities and how those inabilities, into adulthood affect their matriculation rate in college.

The Methodology explains the data collection aspect of research. This section discussed the IRB completion process, number of participants interviewed, data collection methods, including the rationale behind choosing Narrative Research as an approach to Qualitative data.

The Findings speaks to the dialogue between the researcher and the participant. In this section, participants discuss their academic barriers and successes in college, along with whether that participant felt prepared academically. This section is beneficial in finding themes from participants concerning their overall college experience and their relationship with staff members. Moreover, this section is beneficial in discussing the recommendations of the research. Such recommendations suggest that institutions incorporate an academic needs assessment for new students exhibiting academic difficulties. The academic needs assessment is similar to that of an academic evaluation, for the purpose of helping students navigate through difficult courses prior to enrollment.

Racial Disparities in Education

For many years, Black and Hispanic undergraduate students from marginalized communities have been dealing with serious inequities in education. These students are among the group that have challenges being accepted in their college of choice, based on their socioeconomic status and educational experiences (Libassi, 2018). Black and Hispanic graduates generally attend institutions that have less money to spend on offering a quality education. Additionally, this student group is significantly underrepresented in fields such as education, statistics, mathematics and education (Libassi, 2018). As a result, marginalized students of color typically receive poor education in high school and college in comparison to their White counterparts. Yet, even if students of color earn credentials from institutions similar to their white counterparts, there can be inequalities in how much an institution spends to educate their students (Libassi, 2018).

In terms of representation, Hispanic undergraduate students are less likely to complete their college degree than their White and Black counterparts. There are 40 Hispanic Bachelor's degree recipients in education for every 1,000 Hispanic bachelor's degree recipients, compared to 65 white graduates with an education bachelor's degree per 1,000 white bachelor's degree recipients (Libassi, 2018). What does this all mean? The explanation is that marginalized undergraduate students of color have many barriers that prevent them from matriculating their degree plan, such as child care issues, being unprepared for college from attending failing high schools, poor study habit, lack of accessibility, lack of institutional funding and limited teacher-student relationships in high school. In addition to this student group's myriad of barriers before attending college, there appears to be institutional structural disparities in college that may prevent this student group from completing their degree plan (Moore et al, 2017).

The next section will focus on the barriers and successes that undergraduate community college students from marginalized communities face. This study also plans to shed some light on the parental dependency of this group and the disadvantages of attending failing urban high schools in marginalized communities and how these barriers affect students' cognitive abilities; quite specifically, members of the Generation Z and Millennial student group.

Literature Review

There are challenges that students from marginalized communities face that are in addition to the usual challenge for any college student. These challenges include poor studying habits, lack of academic preparedness and limited effective teacher-student relationships in high school (Moore et al, 2017). This literature review will highlight the characteristics and comparative contrast between diverse Generation Z and Millennial students, and their development and behaviors in academia. While there are many reasons why undergraduate community college students do not attain their college degree, this study plans to focus on the lived experiences of students from marginalized communities. Within current community colleges students are diverse groups. One sub-group, the population focused on in this study, may be Generation Z but has a specific limitation that other members of Generation Z will not bring to community college—the limited education that their high school education provided. The following profile of Generation Z is general and includes characteristics that may be typical of the subgroup focused on in this study.

As we are looking at college attendance, growth is seen as Millennials began to enter college around the year 2000. This growth of Generation Z students can be seen in absolute terms, with a fifty-four percent enrollment increase in colleges and universities. This reflects a growth in population and a larger percentage of eighteen to twenty-four-year old's seeking postsecondary education. This growth has continued as Generation Z students began to arrive at universities in 2016 (Moore et al, 2017, p.113).

Characteristics attributed to Generation Z students are that they prefer “independent, self-paced learning, with opportunities for collaboration, as needed. They see their instructor as a learning facilitator, who helps them to develop relevant and practical skills. They may also need help critically evaluating online sources and learning how to process substantial amounts of information” (Moore et al, 2017, p.116). Generation Z as well as Millennials seem to prefer face-to-face interactions with their teachers and peers, as opposed to a distance education format and thrive on the latest technological advances, such as computers, social media, multimedia and urban terminology. The only difference between Generation Z and Millennials is that millennial students became computer literate from high school into college. On the other hand, Generation Z students became computer literate from primary into secondary schools (Moore et al, 2017). While that last characteristic—computer literacy—may be generally applicable, there is evidence of an opposite situation-- the limited access to technology that the “digital divide” imposed on students in schools within a marginalized community.

According to Coomes and DeBard (2004), this generation of students and their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors will require student affairs practitioners to adopt new learning and service strategies, rethink student development theories, and modify educational environments. In this chapter, related research narrows the dimensional focus of student engagement, academic success, lived experiences and the barriers that centers around underserved students from failing schools. This portion of the literature review analyzes the limitations that will continue to affect students' academic progress after high school.

Disadvantages to Attending Urban High Schools in Marginalized Communities

Some of the issues that affect high school students in marginalized communities are uneven attendance, limited curricula, below average academic achievement, and disengagement from academics. These factors may result in this student group being underprepared for college requirements and the expectations of college. Often these students struggle to complete high school and are less likely to attend college (Rothstein, 2014). Still, students from low-achieving high schools who enroll in community colleges are often seeking an associate degree. Reasons for this group to attend college include helping their family financially, sense of self-worth, and for encouragement from others. Such reasons for attending college may influence academic engagement and positive outcomes (Phinney et al, 2006).

Additionally, there are other motivating factors for college attendance, such as obtaining a respectable job, success, financial rewards; such as a career, developing oneself personally and intellectually and humanitarian efforts; such as helping others to succeed (Phinney et al, 2006). However, there is less attention on long-term institutional goals, such as enrolling in college to obtain a degree. With that being said, it is obvious that some students attend college, regardless of academic struggles (Phinney et al, 2006).

Students choosing to continue their education into their college years still have issues with cognitive abilities developed over time from their childhood. Rothstein (2014, p.6) explained some of the factors contributing to lessened cognitive abilities for children from marginalized communities are as follows: disruption of cognitive abilities from living in less thriving communities for decades. Rothstein (2014) stated that these cognitive ability issues create problems for students in marginalized communities because they were not able to take full advantage of the resources that were typically available to students in other communities; such as that of students in suburban communities, which included after-school programs and computer-based programs. These academic issues are found to affect students' cognitive abilities (Rothstein, 2014, p.4). Additionally, another factor is having parents with literacy problems and difficulty interacting with their children. In a household with less literate parents, the parents have difficulty assisting their children with homework assignments and they typically are not motivated to help them academically because they often do not understand the academic subject-matter and offer no emotional support (Rothstein, 2014, p. 6).

Another academic barrier for marginalized children with cognitive abilities is the lack of quality education. Children from urban, marginalized communities are likely to receive a subpar education in comparison to children from suburban communities. Additionally, the combination of social and economic pressures, along with attending high schools that are less equipped to prepare students to thrive in school can be academically detrimental. "Living in high-poverty neighborhoods for multiple generations adds an additional barrier to achievement, and multigenerational segregated poverty characterizes many African American children today, as they deal with de facto trends" (Rothstein, 2014, p. 1). However, this may only be a part of barriers students face while living in marginalized communities. Students attending schools in marginalized communities are unlikely to receive the same quality education in comparison to students from suburban communities (Rothstein, 2014, p. 7).

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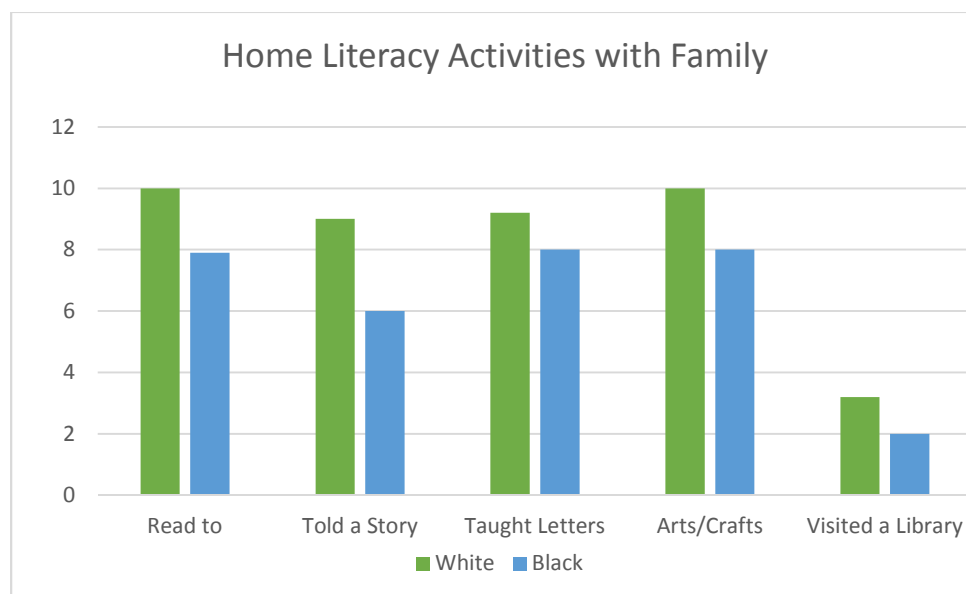
Disparities that exist in schools in marginalized communities relate to lack of institutional funding (Rothstein, 2014). For example, science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses that are used to build intellectual abilities in students normally offered in suburban schools are not offered in urban or marginalized school systems. Hudley (2013, p.1) stated: “mathematics and science courses in urban schools are often taught by teachers lacking the credentials to teach such courses.” This is a clear-cut example of the lack of academic preparation and institutional success for students from marginalized communities. In addition to factors relating to educational barriers for students from marginalized communities, Hudley (2013, p.1) stated that “students from marginalized, high-poverty institutions often use outdated equipment such as computers, textbooks, lab materials and inadequate science equipment, which can diminish student engagement and achievement.”

In summation, the first components of institutional disparities for low-income, urban students are lack of academic preparation and a lack of institutional funding, as mentioned above. A secondary component to the difficulties that low-income, urban students face in human development is the tendency for lower-income parents to engage in harsher, less responsive interactions with their children in their early developmental years (Evans & Kim, 2012, p. 43). Evans and Kim (2012) stated the following concerning low-income, lack of parental engagement:

Low-income families have more conflict and hostility and are more likely to rely on corporal punishment than more affluent families. Less responsive parenting in disadvantaged families include less attention and social support to children’s emotional needs as well as less instrumental support, such as helping children with school work or providing information or material assistance, for example, less help finding part-time work and applying to college and less available money (p.43).

The main reason poverty is detrimental to children is because they have less cognitively stimulating environments, with less available media, fewer informal learning venues, less educational materials available and too much exposure to television (Evans & Kim, 2012). “Poor children also live in impoverished language environments where fewer words are spoken and parents read to them less often” (Evans & Kim, 2012, p. 8). Table 1 below reflects that Black children are less proficient in developmental skills than 91 percent of their White counterparts from ages 3-5 years of age. Table 1 illustrates a comparison in the amount of time White parents taught and engaged their children overall with literacy material in contrast to Black parents.

Table 1: Home Literacy Activities with Family (Evans & Kim, 2012).



The third component affecting urban students’ academic development is teacher expectations of students in the classroom. Based on student-teacher interactions in the classroom, the development of norms, and whether the interactions between students and teachers are positive or negative; can be predictors to whether students succeed or fail academically (Ercole, 2009, p.4). An example of a classroom norm based on teacher’s perception of a student is the student’s behavior within the classroom. In a poverty-level community, children often display emotional distress based on their impoverished environment. With that being said, those attitudes and behaviors are often displayed in the classroom setting. For these particular students with behavioral issues, they are often listed as “trouble-makers” by the teacher. In response to negative student behaviors (such as fighting, stealing, lying, etc.) teachers may separate “trouble-makers” from students that teachers perceive have academic promise (Ercole, 2009).

In this case, a teacher’s perception of students who display negative behaviors in the classroom are not promising, and they perceive those students are failures, which is called a Self-fulfilling Prophecy. In other words, teachers have a profound effect on whether a student passes or fails academically based on their mindset concerning the student. If a teacher makes students feel they are academically inadequate and are failures in comparison to smarter students, the student will usually receive poor grades. The opposite occurs when a teacher perceives students are smarter than most students and receives compliments from the teacher (Riley & Ungerleider, 2011, p. 305).

Additionally, according to Riley and Ungerleider (2011):

In the Self-fulfilling Prophecy, expectations could potentially shape and maintain ethnical and racial discrimination. False perceptions that African American people are “inferior” in education and are at risk of becoming a reality if the dominant White authorities continue to spend less than one-fifth as much on education for

African American students as it did on White students. Studies suggest that teachers' stereotypes regarding gender, ethnic group membership, and socio-economic status may lead to lowered expectations which could trigger self-fulfilling prophecies or perceptual biases that could potentially influence students' academic success (p. 305).

Amidst the myriad of cultural and academic challenges presented in previous sections, there are an increasing number of underrepresented students showing an interest in receiving their high school diploma; ultimately attending college today (Kuh et al, 2006). In addition, the number of diverse backgrounds of students are constantly growing. Women now outnumber men by an increasing margin (Kuh et al, 2006, p.6), and more students from historically underrepresented groups are attending college. "Ninety-seven percent of high school completers reported that they planned to continue their education, and seventy-one percent aspired to earn a bachelor's degree. Two-thirds of those high school completers actually enrolled in some postsecondary education immediately after high school. Two years later, three-quarters were still enrolled" (Kuh et al, 2006, p.6). However, according to Kuh et al (2006):

Enrollment and persistence rates of low-income students; Black, Latino, Native American and students with disabilities continue to lag behind White and Asian students, with Latino students trailing all other ethnic groups. There is also considerable leakage in the educational "pipeline." One hundred ninth graders, sixty-eight high school graduates, forty immediately enter college, twenty-seven are still enrolled their sophomore year, and only eighteen complete any type of postsecondary education within six years of graduating high school (p.6).

According to Kuh et al (2006, p. 27), there were a large number of students from marginalized communities and schools' systems who had a challenging time persisting from high school to their college years. However, there were a considerable number of students from this community who completed college courses, receiving their undergraduate degrees. Thus, Kuh et al (2006, pp. 27-46) suggested the contributing factors to student's success for this demographic group was from receiving a quality high school education, which included college preparatory courses, rigorous high school programs; such as accelerated math courses, four years of math, science and English. Other contributing factors towards academic success were students with college educated parents, pre-college encouragement programs, consistent interactions between students and faculty members concerning homework assignments and tests, along with their interests of becoming successful at large as it relates to academic success (Kuh et al, 2006, p. 36).

In addition to successful student academic experiences, peer interaction, socialization on campus and belonging to student membership clubs based on diversity, religion and academic success are key components to successful academic experiences for students from marginalized communities (Kuh et al, 2006, p. 46). With the growing interest of high school students to complete a college degree, student engagement and ultimately student success is still the most important academic factor towards completion.

This next section will assist in discussing the importance of student engagement and how it impacts student success. The section will begin by breaking down the three dimensions of

student engagement and how students' experiences impact their academic success and ultimately matriculation rates.

Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

According to Trowler (2010) there are three dimensions of student engagement. The three dimensions of student engagement are behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. These three dimensions of student engagement can have a positive or negative effect based on an individual's academic judgment and thought processes. In behavioral engagement, students who are behaviorally engaged would typically comply with behavioral norms, such as attendance and involvement, and would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or negative behavior. In emotional engagement, students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interests, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging (Trowler, 2010). Cognitively engaged students and being vested in learning are closely linked. In cognitive engagement, interested students who were invested in their learning, would seek to go beyond the requirements, and would relish challenges (Trowler, 2010).

Student engagement plays an integral role in student achievement. Student engagement is essential to student achievement in that if a student becomes engaged academically, their potential to become academically successful is greater, as it relates to the classroom climate and student-teacher relationships (Reyes et al, 2012). Student achievement can be defined using traditional measures of academic success, such as meeting university's expectations, good college grades, and adequate credit hours earned in consecutive terms, which represents satisfactory progress toward a degree. A student's persistence to complete their educational goals is linked to their academic achievement, and therefore institutional success (Kuh et al, 2006). It is apparent that students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings (Jordan, 2013).

Student engagement has been defined as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes (Kuh et al, 2006). While research suggests that disengaged students may complete assigned academic work, they do so without interest and commitment. In contrast, engaged students work harder at mastering their learning potential with maximum academic results (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Student engagement is synonymous with student success regarding students' positive academic outcomes and attrition. Learning, persistence, and attainment in college are consistently associated with students' being actively engaged with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they are studying (McClenney, 2013).

Challenges Interfering with Achievement

Many challenges occur that often lead to community college student's failure to matriculate and complete a degree. Of the 45 percent of students who start college and fail to complete their degree, less than one-fourth are dismissed for poor academic performance. Most students leave college for other reasons. Changes in the American family structure are one such factor, as more students come to campus with psychological challenges that, if unattended, can have a debilitating effect on their academic performance and social adjustment (Kuh et al, 2006).

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For most undergraduate community college students from under-resourced communities, pursuing a college degree can be a challenging task without proper academic preparation, concentration, long-term commitment and proper engagement. In some colleges in under-resourced communities, seven to twenty-four percent of undergraduate college students graduate within three years of enrollment. With these statistics, seventy-six to ninety-three percent of students invest in paying for three years' worth of education without receiving their college degree (Rath et al, 2013).

Student success challenges often relate to issues such as inadequate academic preparation, remedial education, lack of academic funding, lack of non-academic skills, and competing obligations to work (Rath et al, 2013). These challenges often set students up for failure, with time and money wasted taking remedial courses to fill gaps in the knowledge they should have acquired while still enrolled in high school. In fact, inadequate academic preparation is a cost that must be paid twice, with taxpayers paying first for students to learn academic material while in high school and again once students are enrolled in college (Rath et al, 2013).

This study investigated factors relating to the challenges and successes community college students from marginalized communities face, along with the resources that may be available to students who may struggle academically. Further research investigated the factors leading to academic successes for this student group. The research question centers around what students who attended academically failing high schools identify as needs to enable them to successfully complete their community college degree. This investigation focused on how some students succeed regardless of attending failing high schools. Additionally it highlights the challenges that students from marginalized communities face and strategies and structures to enable them to succeed academically in a community college.

Problem Statement

The problem is a large number of college students from under resourced communities are not persisting to complete their associate degree (Rath et al, 2013). The main focus of this study was to understand why some students from under resourced communities are not matriculating through community college, and to determine what strategies and structures a community college can implement to address this problem.

This research examines the institutional experiences of community college students from marginalized communities. It also identifies institutional resources and other factors that may be appropriate to enhance the engagement of this population of students. Conclusions were based on an analysis of interview data and the review of research in this field. Finally this work highlights strategies that have been identified to assist academic progress of this student group.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study is rooted in the qualitative methodology of narrative research. The rationale for choosing narrative research in this research process was to allow participants to tell their stories from their lived experiences, understanding their thought processes and social norms as a cohesive process. According to Coulter (2009):

The participant's vicarious experience includes both intellectual and emotional aspects. The judicious use of literary elements can create a compelling, persuasive, believable account. Doing so makes it possible for the participant to be a part of the writer's experience vicariously and the text to be read undoubtedly; so that social change may be fostered both on the inside and on the outside (p.3).

Narrative Research is the method of structuring meaningful life experiences into a story, through creating narratives. In Latin, the noun *narratio* means a narrative or a story, and the verb *narrare* to tell or narrate. A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant for the narrator or her or his audience (Moen, 2006, p. 4). "Narrative research is thus the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narratives of experience" (Moen, 2006). Moen et al 2006 stated the following from Vygotsky's (1978) developmental analysis:

Vygotsky states that human learning and development occur in socially and culturally shaped contexts. How people become what they are thus depends on what they have experienced in the social contexts in which they have participated. The social contexts individuals encounter is based on where they are at any particular point in time. As historical conditions are constantly changing, this also results in changed contexts and opportunities for learning and development (p.3).

Through narrative research, the researcher and the participant will have a dialogue, drawing out inquiries concerning the participant's lived experiences and framing a reference; hence the approach of narrative inquiry (Moen, 2006). From an investigative qualitative approach, the researcher plans to draw out a narrative from the participant in their natural setting "attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that the participant brings to researcher. The immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the participant's point of view, are thus crucial" (Moen, 2006, p. 5).

The research question from this study explored the central research question: "What do students who graduated from academically failing high schools have to say about obstacles they face to complete their community college degree?" This central question is important in discussing this student group's experiences in the classroom, within the higher education institution, and at home with parents and/or other family members. In discussing key terminology, the researcher considered it important to define words or phrases used within the

study. By doing so, the reader remains engaged through understanding the researcher's intentions in how those words and phrases are used in context.

The Institutional Review Board approved this research project as an exempt level 3 category, for the purpose of interviewing no more than 14 human subjects as participants in the research. After approval from the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I recruited students by posting a recruitment letter at a local college in Wisconsin, with permission from their Institutional Review Board. Additionally, I recruited participants via social media through posting the research criteria and requesting perspective participants to contact the researcher via Facebook messenger if interested in interviewing. Four participants responded and fit the criteria for interviewing from local colleges in Wisconsin, and three participants responded and fit the criteria for interviewing via social media.

Overall, I interviewed a total of seven current and previous community college students. After the interviews, I coded and transcribed a dialogue with students in a few community colleges in Wisconsin. Thus, I also interviewed students via Skype from various community colleges in Illinois and Indiana, with their permission. The students were identified through the university's assistance as having completed their high school degree at schools classified as low-performing neighborhood high schools in low-income communities. In interviewing students, I sought to understand the kinds of obstacles that students identify that limit their academic success.

After written consent, each of the seven participants were interviewed for 60-90 minutes to collect adequate data. My plan was to utilize the data collected from these participants to understand the needs of students from underrepresented areas. The researcher asked each of the seven participants for written permission to contact them later for any follow-up questions to clarify interview results. After receiving written permission from participants to interview, the researcher asked them a series of questions relating to the challenges they faced academically and supports that have enabled them to overcome any of those obstacles. Participants had the choice of opting out of answering any questions that made them feel uncomfortable or could discontinue the interviewing process at any time. A sample of my interview questions are as follows, with a complete list of all interview questions included in Appendix A of this study.

How would you describe your relationship with high school and college teachers?

Were college-level courses offered to you in high school?

What courses are you experiencing the most academic difficulty?

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college?

What kinds of opportunities and/or supports have been available to you since being enrolled in this institution?

Is family supportive of your education?

Methods of contacting participants for interviews began with identifying a convenient time for me to meet with them. In the initial communication, the researcher explained the project and requested time to have a dialogue with them as a participant in my study. Those seven

participants scheduled a time that the researcher could speak with them when they were less likely to be busy from attending classes. After the interviews, each participant's permission was requested, including any follow-up questions. Most of my participants stated that they preferred not to be contacted for follow-up questions.

The researcher recorded all the interviews, with participants' consent. When the interviews were completed, the information was transcribed verbatim through typing and documenting the dialogue between the researcher and participant from the audio-recording used during interviews. The researcher then completed a content analysis of the interviews and used the findings of those analysis in drawing conclusions about ways to support community college students from underserved communities to complete their associate degree.

Definition of Key Terminology

Student engagement- The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they must learn and progress in their education.

Academic success- Meeting the university's expectations for being in good standing and making satisfactory progress towards a degree

College preparatory courses- A means by which college bound high school students may better meet the more stringent scholastic requirements for entry into colleges and universities

Narrative research- the method of structuring meaningful life experiences into a story, through creating narratives.

Self-fulfilling prophecy- Process by which one's expectations about another person eventually lead the other person to behave in ways that confirm these expectations

Role of the Researcher

My identity as a Black female student from a marginalized community afforded me an empathetic perspective for this study. I was raised in a low-income, single-parent household with five siblings. My experience attending high school in a marginalized community was very general. There were no advanced placement courses or college preparatory courses available to students in my school. I identify myself as a graduate student attending a Catholic institution of higher education.

My background and experiences helped in drawing a narrative from each participant concerning their own personal academic strengths and weaknesses, discovering whether their institutional experiences were similar to the experiences that I had as a student from a marginalized community. Considering I may have had differing academic views from my participants, the structured interview questions about participants' institutional experiences steered away from my personal views. My unique background of being raised in a marginalized community and in a low-income family provided a degree of credibility and rapport in relating to my study participants.

Specific Aims

The specific aim of this research is to determine the academic challenges and needs of the community college student from marginalized communities. The aim of this research is centered around the academic strengths and difficulties that this student group had, based on being from an underprivileged community and not having the same or equal educational opportunities as other privileged races in relationship to social and cultural capital. An example of the opportunities that were not often available to underserved students is college preparatory courses, which should have been offered to these students in high school.

Jackson (2012) indicates that “college preparatory programs that both maintain high standards and increase participation in rigorous courses can improve college readiness and long-run educational and labor market outcomes.” Therefore, college preparatory courses strengthen high school students’ knowledge of what to expect in college, along with the necessary academic skills that students need to succeed in college (for example, test-taking and note-taking skills). However, underserved students usually lack the opportunity to take part in this type of program; as it is a privilege to most students. Thus, underserved students are normally at an educational disadvantage to succeed in their first year of college (Jackson, 2012).

Findings

Analysis of Participants' Responses

This section presents analysis of data collected from seven undergraduate community college students from marginalized communities. These seven participants were interviewed to gain their perspective concerning their academic engagement and institutional experiences from high school into their early college years. During each interview, indepth questions were posed to each participant that related to their relationship with teachers, counselors, family members and their academic preparation, or lack there of, from high school into their college years. Each of the seven interviews were conducted based on the participants choice, in person and via Skype. Each of the participants answered each interview question according to their personal experiences, information and used a pseudonym prior to interviewing. This analysis seeks to revisit the lived experiences of each participate and draw a narrative of their institutional experiences as it relates to the capstone research questions.

Table 2: Participants Demographic Information

NAME	SCHOOL	AGE	ETHNICITY	GENDER	INTERVIEW TYPE
Letitia	Milwaukee Technical College- Milwaukee, WI	20	Black	Female	Skype
Terrance	Gateway Technical College, Kenosha, WI	21	Black	Male	Face to Face
Josie	Gateway Technical College, Racine, WI	24	White	Female	Face to Face
Amber	Sweet Briar College, Amhurst, VA	24	White	Female	Face to Face
Marie	College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL	23	Black	Female	Skype
Jade	South Suburban College, South Holland, IL	24	Black	Female	Skype
Crystal	Gateway Technical College, Racine, WI	22	Hispanic	Female	Face to Face

In this section, the questions and responses of all seven interviews will be documented. In bold lettering will be the researcher's questions and in quotations will be the participant's responses to the researcher's questions. The first interview was with a twenty-year-old named, Letitia. Letitia

attended Milwaukee Area Technical College in Milwaukee, WI. Our interview took place via Skype. The following interview was Letitia's academic experience:

Letitia's Dialogue:

Hi, Letitia.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Letitia's Relationship with Staff "I am from a single-family home, raised by my mother. In high school, my relationship with teachers and counselors was pretty basic. I talked to teachers if I had a problem with my assignments, in terms of not understanding the subjects or homework, and they helped me to better understand the assignments as much as possible. As for my high school counselors, I didn't really have a relationship with them. They discussed stuff like potentially not passing courses with me and the effects of unexcused absences towards graduation, but that was it."

As the researcher had a dialogue with Letitia, there was a notable resounding disconnect between the staff members and Letitia academically. The researcher assumed a disconnect through Letitia voicing that their teachers had absolutely no relationship with her or other students. It appeared that there was no sense of camaraderie between students and staff members, as Letitia discussed their distant relationship as being "commonplace" in their school setting. The researcher attempted to better understand the relationship that Letitia had with staff members.

Additional questions emerged and were asked concerning their college years with staff members. The researcher wanted to know if there was a personal touch that one teacher may have had with her. The researcher readily shared her own conversation with Letitia about her college experience with staff members. What the researcher really wanted Letitia to share (but did not actually ask these questions) was the qualities of their favorite teacher and what made that teacher so special. How did they make you feel? Did other students in class feel the same way about this teacher as you did? Why? One pertinent question that existed was the following:

How was your academic relationship with college teachers and counselors? Did that relationship differ from the relationship you had with high school staff members?

Letitia answered, "In college, my teachers were under the impression that all the students understood the college curriculum and subject matter, so they gave us our syllabus, assignments, explained their expectations and that was it. I had no clue on what was expected of me in college, so the first semester was difficult for me academically. Some of my college teachers were beneficial in helping me navigate through understanding my assignments and providing their email address and offering help with clarifying expectation whenever necessary. Other teachers had high expectation that students should have already learned what was expected of them in high school and to get the assignments done without no necessary clarification. One of my teachers stated that all I needed to do was to follow the syllabus, reread it and it would explain all I needed to know."

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Letitia's Academic Experiences

“In terms of my college status, I am currently a fulltime student that was never required to take remedial classes and I scored pretty well on my placement tests. Needless to say, the courses that I experienced the most academic difficulty in college would be math and English. One of the first classes I had was college math and it was hard. I was not that advanced in math during high school. I feel that the hardest part about English is writing formal papers and citing references.”

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

“I did not really feel prepared for college. My high school did have some college prep courses available to students, but students had to be advanced, like honor students to register for those courses. So, let me just say that I was not an honor student and did not have the opportunity to take college prep courses in high school.”

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“I have not received any special services in college, but I did receive tutoring for a couple of my classes; especially math class.”

Any perception from high school?

“In terms of perceptions in high school, I was under the impression that we (students) were being taught everything that we needed to know to prepare us all for college and that college would not be so difficult.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“Even though I had some academic issues, I think that I performed well enough. My grade point average in high school was a 3.0; and in college it ranged from a 2.5 to a 3.0. I know that I could do better, but I need better time management skills.”

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college? How have you responded to these challenges?

“I was not academically prepared for college as I transitioned from high school, so I had some barriers in terms of passing my courses when I first started because I didn't understand a lot of what I was expected to do when I started college. At first, I wanted to give up and drop out because the classes were hard and I didn't have anyone to help me navigate through the process; but I kept trying, asking questions and forming study groups with other classmates to help me with my assignments.”

What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

“Well, I think that my instructors play a positive and negative role in my coursework. The instructors that are helpful, such as the ones that offer assistance when I don’t understand my assignments are supportive and play a positive role in helping me succeed academically. However, the instructors that refuse to help and refer me to my syllabus to understand the assignments and course load play a negative role in my academic success.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“I think that my college experience would be better if I had more teachers to buy-in to helping me succeed through explaining the assignments thoroughly and giving examples for assignments so that I can better understand them. Also, I was thinking that taking a college preparatory course in college could better prepare me for test-taking skills and help with future courses.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“In terms of my college experience, most of the teachers are nice and helpful. But most of the students are stuck up. They laugh at you in class if you ask a question to the teacher that they perceive as a stupid question; which is so embarrassing. Most of the time, when I have question about the class now, I email my teachers or ask question one-on-one with the teacher after class to prevent classroom embarrassment. I chose this college because it is close to home for me. I live in Milwaukee and I’m not too far from the campus. On the other hand, my first preference was to apply for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee because I heard about their wonderful curriculum and programs, but I didn’t get accepted; so, then I chose MATC (Milwaukee Area Technical College) as my secondary option.”

Letitia’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“My mom is really supportive and wants me to finish college. She helps me with my daughter when she doesn’t have to work, so that I can have study time and make it to class with no excuses.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“My biggest challenges have been daycare for my daughter. My mother helps me a lot on her off days from work, but when she does have to work, I often ask other family members to help me so that I don’t have to miss classes and fall behind on my studies.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“I am definitely on track towards completion. My mom has helped me stay on track. She

makes sure that I get my study time by watching my baby while I study. I could not have done this without my mother's support."

Letitia's Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

"My major is Psychology and I plan to graduate in May 2021. So far, I'm not experiencing any issues with graduating on time, as long as I stay on course and keep doing what I have been doing; which is my homework and going to class."

Are you aware of the resources offered in your college?

"Well, not really. I'm still trying to find out what is available to students in my school, but I have to say that the book buyback program is beneficial in keeping money in your pocket."

What has been your greatest success in college?

"My greatest success has been staying the course.... that's what my mother always says. I guess what I mean is that I have not gave up on my goals of staying in school so far and not found any excuse to drop out. So, my success has been to keep trying and never giving up on myself."

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

"Yes, I do. I plan to finish my associate degree, complete a bachelor's degree in psychology; then pursue my master's in counseling psychology. Hopefully, by the time I receive a higher GPA, I will get accepted in the University of Wisconsin system for my master's program."

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

"I think that students should be required to learn about college courses in high school, whether they are honor students or not. All students should be prepared for college and have the opportunity to learn so that they will not be oblivious to the course curriculum when they start their college journey."

Barriers and Successes

As the interview was concluded, there was a realization concerning the barriers and successes that Letitia endured personally and academically. Letitia did not receive college preparatory courses in high school. So they felt unprepared for college life. Letitia stated a lot concerning their academic barrier from high school in math; which they carried into their college years. Overall, Letitia had some support from college professors that assisted them with their academic difficulties with math and other barriers, such as college writing. Other professors expected that

Letitia should have honed their math skills in high school and refused to coach them with their academic difficulties. However, Letitia prevailed in college academically and utilized the resources that were available to build their academic skills. Thus, Letitia is from a single-family home and had a great family support system; which assisted them to completing their education. Letitia appeared to be upbeat in spirit and there is an assumption that they will do wonderfully in their academic future, as long as they continues to strive for their goals.

The following interview was with a twenty-one-year-old named, Terrance. Terrance attended Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, WI. Our interview took place face-to-face. The following interview was Terrance's academic experience:

Terrance's Dialogue:

Hello, Terrance.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Terrance's Relationship with Staff

"I was raised by both parents, until my father passed away when I was 14 years old. I had a very good relationship with my teachers and counselors in high school. My teachers considered me to be one of the smartest students in class, so I had no issues with homework, assignments, tests or attendance. My counselors were not as intricate in my academic career, but they did discuss my options for college. I didn't really have a relationship with my teachers and counselors in college. I read my syllabus at the beginning of the semester and asked questions if I didn't understand the content; but ultimately, I did the work and received good grades. The only time I had a talk to my counselor was when he helped me choose courses for the following semester."

The researcher's first impression of Terrance was that they seemed very confident of their academic abilities and asked pertinent questions to staff members whenever necessary. The researcher wanted to talk more to Terrance concerning their challenges and perception in high school and college to better understand if they had similar difficulties as my first participant. The next proposed question could assist in understanding Terrance's academic experiences better:

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Terrance's Academic Experiences

"Primarily, I am enrolled as a fulltime student. However, periodically I may enroll part-time status one semester out of the year. I have never had any academic difficulties in any of my courses. Definitely no remedial courses. I started college understanding what to expect and studied on a regular basis for any subject that was more advanced than what I was accustomed to."

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

“Actually, I did feel prepared for college. I have been an honor student since elementary school. By the time I made it to high school, I was able to *test-out* of the subjects that I was good in. I took college-level courses for all my subjects in high school; writing, math, history, etc. It’s not that I feel I needed college preparatory courses in high school to prepare me for college, but I think that those courses enhanced the skills that I already had for college.”

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“No, I’m not receiving any special services or tutoring services. As a matter of fact, I tutor other students with academic difficulties.”

Any perceptions or challenges from high school or college?

“Well, I didn’t have any challenges in high school or college because I was always vocal about anything that I needed clarification on. My perception was that college would be much more intense academically, but I guess I’m blessed.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“I think that I performed as well as expected in high school into college. In high school, I maintained a 4.0, but in college, I dropped down to a 3.8. My plan is to score high grades on my next few classes to bring my grade point average back up to a 4.0. Some universities expect consistent high scores to get accepted into their institutions; so I will need to do better for graduate school acceptance.”

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college? How have you responded to these challenges?

“Well, I can’t think of any challenges academically, but if I had to choose one, it would be deciding what institution would be best suited for me academically; because I never thought I would be pursuing my degree at a junior college.”

What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

“Just communicating their expectations of the course and providing an open-door policy to contact them if I have questions or concerns about the coursework. College professors have enough on their agenda then to be guiding students into being better at their academic craft. Not to be condescending but if students really need help from their instructors, then that’s one thing. But if the majority of the students in the classroom need one-on-one attention academically, that could become problematic for the teacher, don’t you think?”

The researcher answered Terrance question by stating the following response, “I’m not sure, Terrance. I suppose that if teachers become overwhelmed with a surplus of students needing academic assistance, they would direct those students to other institutional resources.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“Well, I think having a bridge program would be beneficial; which incorporates receiving a bachelor’s degree in less time than four years, if a student has the academic abilities to do so. I’m not sure if my instructors could play a role in this, but my advisor surely could. My advisor could inform me of various local colleges and universities that offer a bridge program where I could take advantage of this and graduate sooner than later.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“I have been grateful for my positive college experiences. I have not had any realistic problem with coursework, peers or instructors since I’ve been enrolled. However, I didn’t necessarily *choose* this institution for my academic studies on my own accord. I was accepted to Brown University and Texas A&M, but my mother wanted me to choose a college or university close to home because she felt that she would miss my presence and she needed me to be around since my father passed away. I never considered attending a community college. I was upset that I had to lower my standards to please my mother, but I suppose sometimes you must make sacrifices, right?”

Terrance’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“My entire family is supportive of my education and we all have a good relationship. My mother is so proud that I am doing well in college, as she has high hopes for me in the workforce.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“There aren’t any challenges that I can mention. My issues are very small ones. Personally, I feel so obligated to physically be present for my mother because she has not dealt with my father’s passing very well. My mother is an emotional wreck and it sometimes interferes with my study time. So my greatest challenges stem from my home life. I’m trying to get my mother some professional counseling so that she can go on with her life; then I can go on with my own.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“I am on track to complete my degree as scheduled. I don’t think that no one, in particular contributed to that because I longed to continue my education. My mother is supportive, but she hasn’t contributed to keeping me on track.”

Terrance’s Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

“My college major is Criminal Justice and I plan to graduate, receiving my Associates degree in May 2020. I have not experienced any issues or concerns with graduating on time.”

Are you aware of the resources offered in your college?

“The only resources that I felt that I should be concerned with was academic scholarships. I applied for a few since attending college, but never received one.”

What has been your greatest success in college?

“I think that my greatest success was having the ability to help others that have academic difficulties flourish in college. In a way, this is a way to give back to my community.”

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

“I am definitely interested in pursuing graduate-level courses in the future. That is the rationale behind enrolling in a bridge program, so that I can receive my bachelor’s degree in a shorter timeframe; then start applying to grad school.”

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

“Not really. I’m just so happy that I met the most amazing teachers and peers in this institution. I’m eager to not only complete my degree and move on to the next level; but to use my academic skills and abilities to help others along the way reach their goals.”

Barriers and Successes

After concluding the interview, the researcher recognized that Terrance had more successes than barriers academically. Terrance received college preparatory courses in high school and always considered himself a scholar. Terrance assure me that they were very prepared for college and beyond. Terrance embodied academic superiority early in life and never encountered any academic difficulties in comparison to their peers. Personally, the only barriers that Terrance faced was in their home life dealing with a grieving mother from the loss of their father years ago.

Terrance stated that they loved school and enjoy helping students with academic difficulties strive for excellence. Terrance had a good relationship with high school and college staff members. Additionally, Terrance is from a two-parent household and has a positive family support system. Terrance’s persona is arrogant, intelligent and sometimes condescending concerning peers that depend on academic assistance from teachers.

Terrance has a winning attitude and can-do approach to success. Terrance will be an academic trailblazer in the future.

The third interview was with a twenty-four-year-old named, Josie. Josie attended Gateway Technical College in Racine, WI. Our interview took place face-to-face. The following interview was Josies’s academic experience:

Josie's Dialogue:

Hello, Josie.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Josie's Relationship with Staff

“Yes, I was raised with both parents in the household. In response to my relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors, my experience was good. In high school most of my teachers I got along with and learned from pretty well. I felt like most of my teachers were my mentors. Also, I went to a private high school, which made the learning environment seem successful than most of what my peers from public school shared about their experiences. As far as high school counselors, my relationship with them was about the same. I felt like I could go to them and discuss any issue I was having with my schedule and my counselor would adjust my schedule accordingly. My counselor also would call me to the office periodically to ask how everything was going with my classes or if there was anything I needed assistance with.”

What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

“My apologies. At Gateway, my teachers were awesome! Most of the students in my class were low income and teachers struggled to get most students to pay attention in class, and to be on the same page. But my teachers went above and beyond to get students to pay attention and learn. They absolutely went above and beyond to help us all succeed. The only thing was that our teachers held us accountable for not putting in the effort and getting the work done so that we could pass the course. The teachers told students that you either pass or you don't...there is no gray area in college studies! However, I didn't have close relationship with my college counselors. I talked to them whenever I needed assistance in registering for classes.”

The researcher noticed that Josie appeared to be confident about her relationship with high school and college staff members. There always seemed to be open communication between Josie and members of staff in an effort to keep her on track academically. Josie appeared to have a positive college experience thus far.

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Josie's Academic Experiences

“I am a full-time student, but I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree. However, while attending Gateway for my Associates degree, I was a full-time student as well. I have never had any remedial classes. I was really nervous about anatomy and physiology because the subject-matter is a lot to remember and that's what everyone that took the class prior to me says. So, if your memory is not too well and you have issues remembering the course load; you'll have big issues. For example, in anatomy class, you have to memorize the parts of the body and their functions, which was scary for me. The

course for the following semesters builds off of what a student could remember from the previous course, so the courses were no joke to learn.”

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

“I personally don’t know if anyone is fully prepared for college. But there were a few advance placement courses, but they weren’t as advanced as they are nowadays. I had some frustrations with getting into A/P courses because one teacher told me that he may not allow me into his class because of my grade point average. At that time, I was a “B” average and he didn’t think that I was smart enough to be in his class. After my counselor enrolled me in his class anyway, I passed the course with “flying colors” but the teacher felt that my passing was by chance and I was just lucky. By the way, it was just an English class!”

So, you just had one college-level course in high school?

“Yes. I know that science class was available as a college-level course, but I didn’t want to have to go through the “red tape” of trying to prove myself smart enough to get accepted into this class as I did in the A/P English class, so I opted out! However, I know that I wasn’t smart enough for A/P math class, so I didn’t even consider wasting their time for that one.”

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“I did in math and science, but I have gotten through all those classes now, so it’s no longer a problem for me. But I feel that I may still need tutoring services for my bachelor’s program because chemistry will be a real headache for me when I start back to school.”

Any perceptions or challenges from high school or college?

“Yes, I really struggled with math and science. When I took my ACT, I got perfect scores in reading and writing, and very low scores in math and science. I really struggled with those two classes and I feel like the teachers that taught those classes understood the content but were not great at teaching it to students that had those learning deficiencies. Teachers were great with students that already understood math, but they were clueless in how to deal with students that were not so good in the class. There were so many learning styles that weren’t addressed in my school, so teachers were disconnected to students with special needs.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“I think that I could have performed much better than I did. In high school, my GPA was 3.2 and in college, I barely scraped pass a 3.0. I was working two jobs, so I didn’t have much time to study.”

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college? How have you responded to these challenges?

“I would have to say time management challenges. I couldn’t necessarily balance work and study life, so I struggled academically with managing my time for homework and study time. I responded by asking for help from tutors when I was overwhelmed and doing homework while at work on one of my jobs.”

What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

“They reached out to struggling students like me, and offered to help with any academic issue that we were having and that helped me get past the issues that I was having so that I could graduate on time. Teachers just really seemed to care about their struggling students at Gateway.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“For my bachelor’s program, to enhance my experience in the future, I pray that the teachers are as giving academically as the teachers at Gateway. I just started my bachelor’s programs and I know that the course load will be intense. I just hope that the teachers are patient with me and not fail me as soon as I have one missing assignment.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“I heard good things about Gateway Technical College. I actually did a government program for low-income students called Career-giver and they paid for uniforms and textbooks if we passed the testing process through Gateway. Students had to work in a government facility for six months to pay it forward helping others; which helped me fund my education at Gateway when my parents didn’t want to help pay for my courses.”

Josie’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“Yes and no! My parents were very particular about what they wanted me to get a degree in and they helped me just enough to pay for most of my education; then I had to get a job to pay for the rest of it. So, when they found out that my bachelor’s degree will be in music; they stated that I will have to fund my own way through college. My parents feel that there is no job waiting for a music degree, so I should choose another field that best suits them.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“None that I can think of. Just trying to live up to my parents standards is quite difficult sometimes, but basically I’m trying to do what is best for me in my life; not my parents. I can only help that they will understand one day.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“I was barely on track to graduate on time, but I did make it! I didn’t really have anyone that contributed to my success in graduating. I guess I got tired of barely making it through; so, I decided to finish and take the pressure off of making the graduation deadline.”

Josie’s Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

“My college major was Occupational Therapy Assistant and I have already graduated from Gateway. My biggest concern when I was attending Gateway Technical College was that I worked a lot. I barely had any time for studying. I worked about 54 hours per week. But I made it through and graduated last year.”

Are/were you aware of the resources offered in your college?

“They were pretty good at explaining resources in college. There were academic advisors, financial aid advisors and general advisors that explained about internships for my field of study and how I could, not only get credit but paid while learning the field work.”

What has been your greatest success in college?

“Graduating. Just being surprised that I actually made it to walk across the stage while working so many hours. But I am so much more confident academically since enrolling in my bachelor’s program. I have learned a sense of self over these last few years and I know that I can do this. I can make it through all adversity.”

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

“I thought about it and I would definitely consider grad school, but I must minimize my workload before attending grad school, otherwise I know I will fail from lack of study time and dedication.”

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

“Yes. I wish that high school tutoring would have been more diversified and that teachers would have had more experience learning about students with different learning styles, so that they would be better suited to teach us in classes that we were struggling in and help us understand the content better. I wish that schools had more flexible learning classes available for students that worked long hours where we had more time to submit homework assignments. I also wish that I learned more about college writing in high school. Even though I had A/P class in high school, I don’t feel like I had enough

experience in writing college-level papers. Learning to speak in third person was strange for me.”

Are you referring to APA format?

“Yes. Absolutely! That’s what it’s called. I’m trying to get better at writing formal papers because it wasn’t a requirement at Gateway as much as it is at Bryant & Stratton; so, I need more practice at it.”

Barriers and Successes

In this interview, the researcher recognized that Josie had most of their academic successes in high school. What really accentuated the success in high school was the relationship that Josie had with staff members and teachers. Moreover, Josie had the academic ability to thrive as they had a chance to participate in Advanced Placement courses, better preparing herself for college.

However, in terms of barriers, Josie had the opportunity to partake in A/P English courses in high school, but later had difficulty writing a formal paper in college. What seems to be strange is merely wondering if Josie received just enough of an English skillset to pass their course; making them unprepared for college-level writing. In addition, Josie had difficulty in math from their high school years, that transcended into their college years. The fact that Josie did not have a chance to correct their math difficulties in high school, by using academic resources, such as tutoring; left them struggling with math in college.

Josie appeared to be upbeat and excited about their educational adventures and communicates very well to teachers when they have an academic issue. Josie is currently enrolled in a Bachelors Degree program now, and is interested in a future pursuit in a Masters Degree program. Josie strives for academic success and will do well as they continue to study and communicate with staff members in the future.

The next interview was conducted face-to-face with a twenty-two year-old named Crystal. Just like Terrance and Josie, Crystal attends Gateway Technical College, Racine, WI Campus. The following interview was Crystal’s academic experience.

Crystal’s Dialogue:

Hi, Crystal.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Crystal’s Relationship with Staff

“I was raised by both of my parents, but my mother died when I was in my teens. The relationship with my teachers and counselors in high school could be somewhat difficult. Sometimes the counselors were hard to get to because they were with other students. Then sometimes the teachers acted like they were too busy to attend to your needs or questions about class assignments or activities that were due. They really had no patience

for helping students individually. But at Gateway, they're pretty good about replying to emails concerning problems or questions with assignments. I haven't really talked to my counselor yet, since I've been in college; so, it's been kind of difficult to explain our relationship because we don't have one yet."

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Crystal's Academic Experiences

"I'm currently attending college part-time. I've never had any remedial courses. Right now, I'm having some trouble with my human services introduction class, only because of the APA format requirement for writing my papers. In high school, we were never taught to use APA format, we only learned about MLA format; so that's kind of the tricky part."

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

"Prepared for college? Not really. I don't feel that high school prepared me for college. And no, college-level courses were never offered to me in high school. College-level courses were available to honor students, but I wasn't one of them."

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

"Yes, I am. Right now, I go the learning success center at Gateway, if I need help with my writing or if I need someone to proof-read it; they do help me with that."

Any perception from high school?

"Sure, probably understanding my expectations of what to include in my writing paper or basically trying to reach my goals communicating with teachers, in terms of getting them to explain how to set up the sentence structure. In college, if you don't understand how to structure your paper correctly, you may complete an entire paper and the teacher would send it back to you and tell you to do it over; which is very frustrating."

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

"My GPA in high school was like a 3.2 and in college, so far it's been between a 3.8 and 3.9. I started high school kind of rocky, but I think I'm doing alright in college so far."

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college? How have you responded to these challenges?

"The biggest one is probably submitting my papers on time. They do give us enough time to submit our papers but working full-time and going to school can be hard to do; especially when you have homework papers to submit. I responded by doing my homework papers on my downtime at work. I work at a group home, so when my clients

are sleeping and I have downtime, I start working on my writing papers.”

What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

“A major role! I may submit a rough draft to my teacher and he/she will contact me back and say that this is what you need to work on, or you forgot a couple of points that you needed to include in your paper. So, my teachers are great at giving me a chance to correct my work, which gives me a chance to be successful in class.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“Probably more online tutor sessions becoming available at different times of day. Like, I would love to be able to receive some tutoring help when I can’t sleep in the middle of the night, or something. Sometimes, though, you send a paper to a tutor for help and they try to help you tweak the paper with no explanation; and I still do understand how they got that answer..... like, that’s not what I’m asking! I also think that having a live tutor would be great for students that are visual learners like me, because sometimes, it’s difficult learning concept online. I think that teachers could let a student know when they are available to tutor students face-to-face. Because I know that some of the teachers at Gateway are tutors, and it would be nice if they could volunteer their time more often to help students succeed in class. I know that teachers can’t give you too much information, because they want you to learn on your own; but a little direction in person would be nice.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“I heard that Gateway has a really good human services program, the tuition is affordable, they have wonderful payment plans and it doesn’t hurt that the college is local to where I live.”

Crystal’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“Yes, they are very supportive of my education. They tell me things like attend to my classes regularly, email your teachers when you don’t understand the assignment, and if you happen to miss a class, correspond with your teachers to find out what you missed.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“Not really. My biggest challenge is staying focused on school knowing that my mother is no longer with me to tell me how proud she is of my taking the next step in my education. She always wanted me to enroll in college and complete my education.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“Yes. Basically, I want to say that my fiancé has contributed to me staying on track because he helped me with my time management skills. He might say something like, “I know that you just want to lay down and get some rest, but is your homework done?” I would get so frustrated with him because he makes me feel like a kid, but I know that he’s just trying to help me succeed. He’s been my number one supporter. He’s really on me to get the work done. Also, he’s the one that came up with the idea to take my computer to work with me and do homework on my downtime. So yes, I am on track to complete my degree on time.”

Crystal’s Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

“I am pursuing my Associates in Human Services.....social working. I plan to graduate in the Spring of 2021. I would say that if I have any issues, it would be making sure that I schedule my classes correctly, so that I can actually be on track to graduate. Because I know that some of my classes are only available certain times of the year, so I have to make sure I take those classes when they’re available so that I graduate on time.”

Are you aware of the resources offered in your college?

“Somewhat. Some of the things that the teachers be talking about I never knew about. For example, they talk about the cellphone program, so if your cellphone breaks, the college will basically give you a cellphone to use, until you can purchase a new one.”

What has been your greatest success in college?

“I would have to say understanding the paperwork. So, I would say that my greatest accomplishment was learning to do the APA format writing correctly. What a stress-reliever.”

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

“Yes. I do want to take my education a little bit further. I want to pursue my master’s degree in human services. So, a Masters degree in human services would be my goal.”

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

“Yes. I think that high schools should get all students ready for college, regardless to whether they are honor students. I say this because, when I walked through those college doors, I was totally clueless in what to expect and what the terminology meant. I left the first class with so many questions for my teacher, relatives that were former students or anyone that could help me understand how to get through my classes. College teachers don’t know or care to ask things like if I ever wrote in APA format or have I been introduced to MLA format. It’s like students are thrown in college with no preparation to succeed and it’s so overwhelming. In high school, I was never taught APA format or never seen it done before; but when you get to college, teachers throw these APA

assignments at you and expect students to get it done! So, I believe that if high schools could get students ready for college, it would be much easier for them to succeed in college. Most kids in high school already fear going to college and they feel that they are not ready for the college experience; and not having the opportunity to take college preparatory classes makes enrolling in college even harder.”

Barriers and Successes

The interviewing process with Crystal was quite interesting. According to Crystal, they had some academic issues in high school and college, especially with writing skills. Therefore, Crystal’s largest barrier revolved around not being prepared for college writing. In terms of successes, Crystal has a great support system, with family encouraging them to succeed on a regular basis; especially their fiancé. Crystal uses their college resources to their benefit and has plans to continue their education into graduate studies. The researcher feels that Crystal will be successful in their academic future as long as they stay focused.

The next interview was conducted face-to-face with a twenty-four year-old named Amber. Amber attended Sweet Briar College in Amhurst, Virginia. The following interview was Amber’s academic experience.

Amber’s Dialogue:

Hi, Amber.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Amber’s Relationship with Staff

“I was raised with both parents present in the household. For the most part, my relationship with high school staff was pretty good. From my freshman through my junior years, I did not really know my counselors. It wasn’t until senior year, when I actually worked in the guidance office, that I actually got to know them. They really didn’t help me a lot with college stuff. So, it was really just me navigating myself through high school on my own. The teachers were pretty distant, emotionally and didn’t really interact with students after class or ask if we had any questions about homework. In college, the teachers were more hands on and assisted students with any problems they may have had with homework; but students had to ask for help. Teachers at my college explained that the way to help students become independent is to give them the opportunity to ask for help, instead of teachers pushing their will on students to provide assistance. I didn’t have that much more relationship with the college counselors as I did with high school counselors. I talked to counselors when choosing my courses for the following semester and had small discussions concerning my plans to graduate; that is all.”

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Amber's Academic Experiences

“I was a full-time student. I didn't have any remedial classes in college. In college, I would have to say, mainly my science-based courses. Physics, biology, and my computer science courses were really hard for me. All my other courses were not as difficult as my problematic courses were.”

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

“I suppose that I was as prepared as I could be. Yes. I did take A/P English classes in high school; which prepared me pretty well for college writing. We had to read several books per week for my classes, so the aspect of frequent reading definitely helped prepare me in other classes, as well.”

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“The only special services I had was when I set up a special time with my teachers to let them know that I was struggling with a class or assignment. Also, getting together with other students, forming a study group, to help me with assignments or readings for class; that would be the only services that I received.”

What were your perceptions or challenges in high school and college?

“Challenges in high school? Well, I think that time management may have been my biggest barrier in high school. I was a part of the swim team, choir, A/P classes, so I had a lot of commitment outside of the school that I had difficulty balancing with my course load. Therefore, time management was definitely hard, but I eventually learned to work through it and use my downtime to study. In college, I think the hardest part was the lack of structure in comparison to high school. In college, you had more free time to do whatever you wanted to do; but in high school, you had to follow a certain time to complete assignments. In high school, students may read and complete assignments one class after another. But in college, students had breaks in between classes to do other things, which can be confusing for new college students. In college, students tend to waste excessive time in completing assignment because a that new-founded freedom; so balancing study habits could be more difficult. I think that was the hardest part for me, encouraging myself to get my homework done; like you have to get this reading completed; you have to finish this work. I feel that college students have way too much freedom.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“I personally think that I performed well as to be expected. In high school it was a 3.9 and in college it ranged from a 3.2- 3.6.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“I don’t think that there was anything that could enhance my college experience. I would have to say that having the opportunity of taking advance placement courses definitely prepared me for college, for the most part. In terms of what role my teacher or advisor would play? I don’t know. I think my teachers and advisors did everything they could possibly do to enhance my college experience. However, I think that my English professors were lacking in how to properly write scholarly papers. Even though I had A/P English classes in high school, I probably learned more about how to write a scholarly paper in high school than I did in college. A lot of the English professors were teaching us paper structure that was contradictory to what was taught to us in high school; so, I think that the English professors may need a revised course on how to write scholarly papers.”

Do you think the A/P English courses in high school were beneficial in preparing you for college-level writing?

“I do, to a certain extent. I think that having A/P courses in high school kept me from being oblivious to the structure of college writing, but high school writing, for me, was not extensive to that of college-level courses. For example, I learned to write as a scholar in high school, but only an abridged version of MLA; not APA format. I think that the classes in high school did help with my English proficiency; but a more detailed version of APA format would have been nice, especially for students pursuing a bachelor’s degree. However, I believe that some high schools are now teaching students an extensive version of APA format; but not when I attended high school.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“There were a few reasons that definitely helped me pursue this college was the program and working with horses. I love horses and I care for them in my spare time, so this was a definite plus for me in choosing a college. One of the other reasons was their academic ratio compared to a lot of women’s colleges were one of the best. They are one of the top 10 colleges for women in the entire country. The last thing that I liked about is was the class size to teacher ratio was very small. The largest class that I can think of at the college was approximately thirty students; and that was a lecture sized psychology course. Once you got into your core classes for your major, there were about three-four students in the entire class. Therefore, I really enjoyed and appreciated the one-on-one interaction with teachers, with such a small class size; and it appeared that teachers were not overwhelmed with assisting student needs. I knew that I would enjoy the intimate and personal connection with my teachers, and I definitely received that.”

Amber’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“Yes, my parents were very supportive of my education. For example, I had an accident in college and broke a couple of bones, and I was constantly in the hospital. Both my parents were there for me; retrieved my homework assignments from school to the hospital and made me realized how important education really is. They felt that, no

matter what, I need to talk to my counselors and professors to explain why I have been missing so many classes; and explain my circumstances. Also, during my second year in college, the school was facing closure; and I was on the fence of whether I should just drop out at that point. My mother stated that I should keep going because that was my dream college and it was more prestigious than most junior colleges, and that I needed to stick it out.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“Not really. My biggest challenge is to just stay focused in continuing my education so I can make my parents proud.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“I am on track because I graduated on time. But I would say, what contributed to that would be my teachers. The teachers take personal interest in helping student succeed and when my teachers noticed that I dropped from an A average to a C- they wondered what was going on and reached out to me before I had a chance to contact them. After I explained that I had an injury and could not attend class in person, teachers took every step to make sure that I had any accommodation that I needed to complete and pass my courses.”

Amber’s Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

“My college major was business, with a minor in mathematics and Eline management. I wasn’t experiencing any concerns with graduating as planned. I graduated with no difficulties receiving my bachelor’s degree in 2016. The only time that I had any concerns was with my computer science class. Me and that class did not click at all. So, it was a struggle to get the necessary class material by a certain time and I feared not being able to graduate because of this class. But, talking to my professor and getting the help that I needed helped me to graduate on time.”

Are/were you aware of the resources offered in your college?

“Yes. We had a tutoring session ever Monday, Wednesday and Friday with a specific tutor. So, if you needed help with any of your classes from English, math and biology, they had a specific person that would help you. Also, there was help applying for financial aid for students that became independent students and was no longer living with their parents. They also assisted students with housing and any other resources that they needed.”

What has been your greatest success in college?

“Besides graduating? I guess receiving the help that I needed towards graduation because my senior year, I was able to broaden my horizons outside of my major and minor

classes; so, I was in several classes outside of comfort zone such as dance and English. So, taking those classes that I wasn't quite comfortable in helped me to see different things in different lights. So, I think that my greatest success was being pushed out of my comfort zone and learn new and interesting things."

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

"I do plan to continue my education and pursue my master's in education. I would like to focus more in human resources; maybe a minor in human resources. So, I guess using my master's degree to focus on running a business."

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

"Sure. I think guidance counselors definitely help in helping student choose their academic path. However, I think that some guidance counselors should be more vocal in discussing choices to students. My guidance counselor failed in discussing my academic choices because there was a disconnect between them and students. They didn't reach out and talk to students in my high school. The only time they talked to students is when the students volunteered their time and needed advice. My guidance counselor did not talk to meet at all, until my senior year; then discussed with me that I was accepted into different colleges and what my choices were. I would have enjoyed talking to her during the first two years of high school. Therefore, I think that it is important for guidance counselors to reach out to their students and make a difference in their academic choices; check on them to figure out what their plan is for the future or ask them if they have any questions about their academic experiences as a whole. I think that doing so would be beneficial for students with a lack of direction in high school."

Barriers and Successes

The dialogue between the researcher and Amber was enlightening. In terms of barriers, some of the issues that persisted with Amber revolved around lack of communication with high school and college staff and teachers. Amber felt as though they were alone and had to navigate their way through high school and only receive assistance from teacher when they asked for it. Amber enrolled in A/P English classes in high school and felt that the courses were somewhat beneficial to them in college, but in grasping the concept of MLA, not APA format writing styles.

In terms of successes, Amber received tutoring in college for courses such as math, english and biology; and felt as though the tutoring program was beneficial to their academic success. Amber also formed a good relationship with teachers later in their undergraduate years, after an injury. Amber felt as though their teachers went above and beyond to help them pass their courses towards graduation. Additionally, Amber has a really good relationship with family member and they support their educational aspirations. Considering Amber has already completed their Bachelors Degree, there is no question that they will be successful in their path to graduate studies.

The next interview was conducted via Skype with a twenty-three year-old named Marie. Marie attended College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. The following interview was Marie's academic experience.

Marie's Dialogue:

Hello, Marie.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Marie's Relationship with Staff

"I am from a single-family home. I was raised by my mother. In high school, my relationship was actually pretty good with staff members. I had a counselor that I always went to discussing my problems in the classroom and at home. With my teachers, I had a good relationship with all of them. I was comfortable going to them when I had a problem or needed help on my assignments, because I really needed their help. In college, I didn't really have a good relationship with staff. At some point, I just didn't feel comfortable talking to them, as I did the high school teacher; maybe because college was so new to me. Sometime, after a class session, I would ask a teacher about how they got the answer to a problem and they would show me how to work it out. But, as far as calling or emailing a teacher when I had a problem, I never did that! I would either ask another student for help or figure out the problem on my own."

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Marie's Academic Experiences

"I was a part-time student because I worked also. I didn't have any remedial courses. The courses that I had the most difficulty with was math and science! I would say that those were the two hardest topics that I struggled on in high school and in college."

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

"I did not feel prepared for college at all. I struggled to pass my classes in high school, so I knew that college would be a challenge for me. College prep classes were not to me specifically. I just took the regular course required classes towards graduation; that was all. I wasn't considered to be advanced in terms of my grade point average or anything. But A/P courses were available in my school, but you had to be considered advanced in that course to be able to register for them. There were students at the school that actually registered and pass their A/P courses, so they were offered at our school; but considering I was academically challenged, so to speak, I did not want to attempt to register for something that I know I couldn't pass."

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“No, I didn’t receive any tutoring services or any other special services on college. I never took the time to look into the services that were offered in college. I’m sure that tutoring would have helped me a lot. I did have one student in class that would help me sometimes after class, but I didn’t want to continue bothering her about helping me. I knew that my classmate had her own assignments to complete, so I stopped asking for help.”

What were your perceptions or challenges in high school and college?

“It was like challenging remembering what I studied, like retaining the studied information. I also had issues with study habits. I never really focused on the time that it took to study for certain classes to help me learn the material. I also had problems with test-taking skills and would panic when it was time for classroom exams. The hardest part for me was remembering all the stuff that I read that would help me pass the exams. So, when it was time for the teacher to ask me about the required reading from homework; I didn’t remember. So, teachers thought that I did not do my homework, when that wasn’t the case. I believe, in college, that was my biggest struggle, too. I got so tired of receiving bad grades in college because I couldn’t perform up to teachers’ standards, that I gave up and quit after my first year in college.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“I don’t think that I performed well at all. I believe that I possibly had an undiagnosed learning disability that prevented me from retaining the information that I learned. I always would feel so sad about not understanding what I learned. My grade point average in high school was a 3.0; but I really struggled academically in school. In college, I can’t remember what it was. I think it was between a 2.5 and a 3.0.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“Well, it’s kind of difficult to say because I know teachers don’t like to feel obligated to help students, but I think what would have enhanced my college experience was for my teachers to notice that I was struggling in class and suggest some services that could have prevented me from failing. Because, I don’t know, I may have needed remedial courses or some service that was tailor-made for students that had difficulty retaining information. I kind of felt like I was all alone and no one cared about whether I passed or failed my courses. But I plan to make it better for myself the next time around.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“Well, I was familiar with this college from high school. College recruiter came to my high school during my senior year and talked about how good of a college it was, and that it was one of the top colleges in Illinois. I chose to give the College of DuPage a try. It was a good school, but mentally, I was not ready for college at that time.”

Marie's Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

"I have a good relationship with my family. Yes, they supported my decision to go to college. My mother was excited that I enrolled in college and offered to help me in any way she possibly could."

Any challenges that you can think of?

"Of course. Obviously my biggest challenge is not knowing how to stay the course. I really hate that I let my learning barriers prevent me from completing my education. I know that if or when I decide to continue my education, it will be an even greater challenge. My mother was really disappointed in my decision to leave school. She felt that I could have found a way to make it work"

Are/were you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

"No. Not now. I was on track to complete my degree as scheduled, but I decided to I gave up and quit."

Marie's Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation. You can also share with me some future plans for returning to school.

"When I first started, it was Criminology. I later changed my major to Cosmetology, but I never finished the degree. Between having trouble passing my courses and getting transportation between college campuses, I got too frustrated and quit. I do plan to go back one day and finish my degree, though."

Are/were you aware of the resources offered in your college?

"Yes. They offered a lot of resources to stuff like STEM classes and tutoring services; which I never took advantage of. Teachers were somewhat helpful in talking to students about college resources; such as the book buyback program and family counseling services, but they failed to discuss the services that could help struggling students like tutoring and study groups. College is a little different than high school in that you work more independently. It's like a do-it-yourself institution whereas no one really helps you, unless you ask for it. College is more independent, and teachers hold you accountable for your work, even if you don't understand it. There were a lot of resources available in college, but I wasn't aware of them all."

What has been your greatest success in college?

"I think my greatest success was learning new things from teachers and my peers. My criminology courses were very interesting a learned a lot about psychology and the criminal mind. College taught me a lot about trying to achieve my goals and where I wanted to be in life. I think that was my greatest success."

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

“I can’t say at this time. My focus right now is to get back enrolled in school and complete my undergraduate degree before I can plan whether I would pursue a graduate-level degree.”

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

“No, I think that you covered most of it. But I would like to add that if a college professor notices a student struggling with passing their classes or understanding the course material, reach out to them. Professors should ask students if they need help; how they can help them; what kinds of issues the student is experiencing; and offer other services to that student that would be beneficial to them to make them feel that their education matters.”

Barriers and Successes

The dialogue between the researcher and Marie was interesting. Considering Marie decided to drop out of school, they appear to have more barriers than successes. Some of the barriers that Marie mentioned was that they didn’t feel the college staff assisted them enough, nor referred them to any academic resources that could benefit them in school. Marie had possible academic special needs and felt pressured to drop out of school, instead of staying grounded. Some of the academic issues that Marie faced were math, science and cognitive inabilities. However, in terms of successes, Marie has a strong family foundation that supports their education. Thus, Marie has a longing to complete their education and discusses that it is in their best interest to give education another chance. There is definitely academic hope for Marie if they receive the special needs services that is required to persist.

The final interview was conducted via Skype with a twenty-four year-old named Jade. Jade attends South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois. The following interview was Jade’s academic experience.

Jade’s Dialogue:

Good afternoon, Jade.

Tell me something about your upbringing. Are you from a single-family home or raised by both parents? What was your relationship with high school and college teachers and counselors?

Jade’s Relationship with Staff

“I am from a single-family home; raised by my mother. I had a good relationship with my teachers in high school and could always talk to them, one-on-one in I needed help with the class or had a question about a topic. I didn’t really have a relationship with my counselors, but I did contact them periodically if I needed to change my class or something like that. I really don’t have a good nor bad relationship with my teachers and counselors in college. I know that I can go to them or shoot them an email if I need help,

and I know they would help me with my problems; but I choose to figure out things on my own. So, my relationship with teachers and counselors in college is similar to the relationship with my teachers and counselors in high school.”

Tell me something about your college status and academic experiences. What courses did you experience the most academic difficulty? Did you have any remedial courses?

Jade’s Academic Experiences

“I am a part-time student. I had a reading 99 class and a math 95 class; which both were remedial. The course that is giving me the most difficulty is math, of course.”

Did you feel prepared for college? Did you receive any college preparatory courses in high school?

“No way. I had such a hard time passing my high school courses. I never considered that I would be able to pass college courses. No, college preparatory courses were not offered to me in high school. I just took the required high school classes.”

Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?

“I have not received any special services so far, but I do plan to get a tutor for math before next semester.”

Any perception from high school?

“Well, my challenge has always been my math classes. When I first went off to college, I attended Indiana State University and I was only there for a semester. I ended up transferring to South Suburban College because I got homesick and missed being away from my mother. I didn’t really perceive that college was going to be hard, in comparison to high school; so, since I had once lived the university life, I knew what to expect in college.”

Overall, how do you think you performed academically from high school into college? What was your grade point average?

“From high school to college, I survived. In high school, my grade point average was a 3.4, and currently in college, it is a 3.0.”

What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college? How have you responded to these challenges?

“Just the normal family balance issues of working, going to school, taking care of my son and doing homework. It was difficult to find a balance with all that I had going on; but things got a little easier once both my son’s grandmothers assisted me with watching my son while I do homework. I didn’t do too bad. I knew that I couldn’t give up, so I just made the best of my circumstances. I had to learn some time management skills to be a better mom and student.”

What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

“I think they do a wonderful job at spreading information to students about course requirements and they try their best to discuss to students to send emails if they have any course or assignment questions. Our professors are great at communicating coursework with us, and they encourage us to ask questions.”

What do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?

“I would say that I could get more involved in college activities and encourage other students that might not be having a positive academic experience. As far as my teachers and advisors, I don’t think there’s nothing more they can do to enhance my college experience. They have been greatly helping me along the way and I can’t complain.”

Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?

“I chose this college because I was away from home before at Indiana State University and got homesick to move back to South Holland with my mother. So, the closest school in our area is South Suburban College; so, I chose this school, I guess for being located close to home.”

Jade’s Family Support and Home Life

What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?

“Yes, they are. They always tell me to finish school no matter what and to do the best I can.”

Any challenges that you can think of?

“Well, I think the biggest challenge for home life is trying to separate family life with my mother and son, to doing homework. I never seem to have much personal time.”

What kinds of opportunities and/or supports have been available to you since being enrolled in this institution?

“The biggest support I could have asked for since being enrolled in college was my family. They have been there for me by helping me with my son, assisting me with homework and providing rides for me to class whenever my car wasn’t working. I really appreciate my family. I don’t know how I would get through this journey without them.”

Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?

“Yes, I’m on track. My counselor has been influential is staying in touch with me to find out if I’m enduring any academic issues, and to discuss my next plans for choosing classes, based on their availability.”

Jade's Plans for the Future

Tell me about your college major, plan for graduation and any concerns you may have towards graduation.

“My major is in education and I plan to graduate in May 2020 with my Associates degree. I’m not experiencing any issues or concerns with graduating. I study really hard and I’m putting in the work to graduate on time.”

Are you aware of the resources offered in your college?

“Yes. I’m aware of the tutoring services offered to students and the academic scholarships that are available to students from urban communities.”

What has been your greatest success in college?

“I think going back to college after leaving for an entire year. I took a short break with school to find daycare for my son. After I got that situation under control, I enrolled back in college and transferred my credits from Indiana State to South Suburban College and started back attending classes.”

Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?

“No. I’m fine with just completing my undergraduate studies.”

Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

“No, I think we talked about everything already.”

Barriers and Successes

The final interview was with Jade. This particular interview was the most interesting than the other interviews because it was difficult to get Jade to elaborate on their responses. Nevertheless, Jade discussed some of their academic barriers. They had remedial courses in college and had difficulty in math. Jade also discussed that they had difficulty remaining in college, away from home because their mother cared for their son and they did not get to see them often. On the other hand, one of Jade’s successes was to transfer to a local college near their mother to be able to spend time with their family, without dropping out of school.

Another of Jade’s successes was that they struggled academically in school in some of their subjects, but had good teachers that helped navigate them through their education; guiding them to academic resources within the college they attended. Just like all the other interviewees, Jade has a strong family support system and depends on their mother to assist them with childcare problems to stay in school. Though Jade has no intention of pursuing graduate studies in the future, it is evident that they strive for academic success, which will assist them in matriculation.

Themes and Patterns

In summary, out of the seven various participants that were interviewed, there were a few patterns that emerged. In unpacking highs and lows from table 5 and table 6 below, based on participants' interviews, 4 out of 7 had barriers in math, 5 out of 7 had a relationship with high school staff, 6 out of 7 had relationship with college staff, 7 out of 7 had supportive family members, 7 out of 7 strived for parental approval and 7 out of 7 had plans to graduate. Emerging themes will be explained in more detail in the discussion section.

Retention and Diversity of Participants' Institutions

After interviewing seven participants, the researcher will elaborate on the statistical data of the following institutions which participants were enrolled. The institutions that will be discussed in this study are the following: Milwaukee Area Technical College or MATC in Wisconsin, Gateway Technical College or GTC in Wisconsin, Sweet Briar College in Virginia, College of DuPage in Illinois, and South Suburban College in Illinois. 3 out of 7 participants attended Gateway Technical College in Wisconsin, 1 out of 7 participants attended Milwaukee Technical College in Wisconsin, 1 out of 7 participants attended Sweet Briar College in Virginia, 1 out of 7 participants attended College of DuPage in Illinois, and 1 out of 7 participants attended South Suburban College in Illinois.

The following graph in Table 3 depicts the retention, graduation rate, and diversity statistics of undergraduate students, based on data from U.S. News and World Report (2020), Milwaukee Area Technical College (2020), Sweet Briar College, (2020), College of DuPage (2020), and South Suburban College (2020). The graph includes institutional retention rates based on gender, as it relates to the following colleges listed above.

Table 3: Retention Data Based on Gender (U.S. News and World Report, 2020)

Institution	Retention Rate	Female Graduates	Male Graduates
Milwaukee Area Technical College (2017 data)	52%	57.5	42.5
Gateway Technical College (2017-18 data)	61%	54	46
Sweet Briar College (2017-18 data)	64.6%	97	3
College of DuPage (2017 data)	74%	56.8	43.2
South Suburban College (2017 data)	57%	50	20

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The graph in Table 4 discusses the retention, graduation rate of undergraduate students, based on data from U.S. News and World Report (2020), Milwaukee Area Technical College (2020), Sweet Briar College, (2020), College of DuPage (2020), and South Suburban College (2020). The graph includes institutional retention rates based on diversity, as it relates to the colleges listed above.

Table 4: Graduate Data Based on Diversity (U.S. News and World Report, 2020)

Institution	White	Black	Hispanic
Milwaukee Area Technical College (2017 data)	40%	26.7%	16.5%
Gateway Technical College (2017-18 data)	59%	9%	15%
Sweet Briar College (2017-18 data)	73%	9%	10%
College of DuPage (2017 data)	51%	6.93%	24.6%
South Suburban College (2017 data)	54%	18.7%	21.6%

*The data from the institutions listed above was used to better understand whether those institutions were equipped to service undergraduate students from marginalized communities or students of color. This data helps to understand the nationality percentile of each institution, including their matriculation rate.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

After over one year of research, Institutional Review Board processes, interviewing seven participants and countless meetings with chairpersons and making revisions of the qualitative data, the research for this study has been completed. The findings of this study centers around “what students who graduated from academically failing high schools have to say about obstacles they face to complete their community college degree.” Out of the seven participants that were interviewed, the focus is to draw out the themes that speaks to those students’ academic barriers and successes. In an effort to draw out the themes that closely relate to the participants’ overall personal and academic experiences, the researcher plans to create a synopsis of findings that existed within the research dialogue.

*Table 5 below shows participants that exhibited barriers or strengths in courses such as math, English and science. The table also displays the support that students had from staff and family members in school, and whether students utilized institutional services.

Table 5: Barriers and Relational Support

	Barriers in Math	Barriers in English	Barriers in Science	Relationship with Staff in High School	Relationship with Staff in College	Family Support	Tutor or Other Service
LETITIA	X			X	X	X	X
TERRANCE				X	X	X	
JOSIE	X		X	X	X	X	
CRYSTAL					X	X	X
AMBER			X		X	X	X
MARIE	X		X	X		X	
JADE	X			X	X	X	

*Table 6 displays whether participants were academically prepared for college and whether they depended on parental approval to matriculate their degree plan.

Table 6: Parental Support and Preparedness

	Prepared for College	College Prep in High School	College Writing Barriers	Parents Approval Needed	Plans to Graduate	College Resources Offered	Time Mgmt. Barriers
LETITIA			X	X	X		
TERRANCE	X	X		X	X		
JOSIE		X	X	X	Graduated	X	X
CRYSTAL			X	X	X		X
AMBER	X	X	X	X	Graduated	X	X
MARIE				X	X	X	
JADE				X	X	X	

The researcher interviewed seven participants from various institutions. The institutions that were part of the study that participants attended were Milwaukee Technical College in Milwaukee, WI; Gateway Technical College in Racine/Kenosha, Wisconsin; Sweet Briar College in Amhurst, Virginia; College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois; and South Suburban College in South Holland, Illinois. Of those seven participants, there were findings that lead to future themes. From lowest to highest, the findings were that 2 out of 7 participants felt they were prepared for college, based on their overall high school experience and 3 out of 7 participants experienced a lack of time management skills, utilized tutoring and other services in college, had academic barriers in science and participated in college preparatory courses.

In contrast, from highest to lowest, the findings were that 7 out of 7 participants had supportive families and wanted to make their parents proud by graduating as planned. Thus, 6 out of 7 participants plan to graduate on time or pursue a graduate-level degree. 5 out of 7 participants had a good relationship with high school staff and communicated academic barriers, while 4 out of 7 participants experienced academic barriers in math as well as barriers with college-level writing skills. Based on these findings, the researcher concludes that if tutoring services and college preparatory courses were offered in all high schools, marginalized students would display less disparities and academic barriers in college.

Themes and Patterns

Based on the seven interviewed participants listed above and, based on their academic experiences, the researcher found themes and patterns that emerged. Those findings were that 7 out of 7 participants had a supportive family and wanted to make their parents proud by receiving their degree as planned. In addition, 6 out of 7 participants planned to graduate on time or wanted to pursue a graduate-level degree. Out of those findings mentioned above, three themes emerged. The first theme, preparedness, stemmed from those participants that felt prepared for college, even though some participants had no college preparatory courses. The second theme, family support, emerged from those participants that explained how well they performed in college based on having supportive family members. Lastly, the third theme, desire to do well, was prevalent given that all participants indicated plans to graduate and pursue graduate-level courses in the future. Therefore, based on the researcher's findings, the emerging themes are preparedness, family support and desire to do well.

Recommendations

Based on this research study and the participants interviews and dialogues that was shared with the researcher, the following recommendations surfaced. The first recommendation, based on this study's narrative research, is for urban high schools to offer a combination of tutoring services (if necessary) and college preparatory courses to all attending high school students, whether students plan to attend college in the future or are displaying academic difficulties. This way, students have a better understanding of collegiate expectations and are better prepared for secondary education. The second recommendation is for local higher education institutions to make some changes within their enrollment processes to fit the needs of struggling students from failing high schools. In part, a small-scale academic needs assessment should become part of a state-wide college curriculum for students from under-served communities based on their special needs from a failing high school system. The best way to implement this idea is to utilize the results of college placement tests from new enrolling students to decipher whether this student is in need of special services and/or resources within the institution or possibly external resources within the community.

After a student scores low on a placement test in general studies, such as math, English or college writing skills, their counselor makes an appointment with the student to discuss their test scores and have a dialogue with the student to whether they are interested in institutional resources that could assist them in attaining the skills necessary to be prepared for their future course that they are exhibiting those academic needs. After the student agrees to accept institutional resources, the counselor implements an academic needs assessment (similar to that of an educational evaluation) that encompasses the area(s) in which the student needs services. This academic needs assessment is forwarded to various services such as the learning center, tutoring programs and/or external services that can successfully prepare that student for that course before enrollment. The third and final recommendation is as follows: after the student partakes in the resources listed above, the counselor reconnects with the student to retest the student in those problematic courses to decipher if any academic improvement occurred. The counselor may reconnect with the student periodically to find out if they have any questions or concerns with any present or future courses within their degree plan. Using creative approaches such as these assists in preventing students from dropping out of school with fears of not being prepared for matriculation.

Conclusion

Though undergraduate students from marginalized communities experience a myriad of academic and personal experiences that create barriers to effective learning, such as attending failing high schools, social norms and cognitive inabilities from their early childhood development, there are implementation practices that could lessen those academic barriers. As mentioned in the recommendations section, those practices should begin in urban high schools and should include college preparatory courses and tutoring services to all students to prepare underserved students for college. In college, implementation should include an academic needs assessment that begins with placement tests, tutoring services and consistent counselor services for students with academic needs prior to the start of the semester courses.

These implementations are not intended to be an end-all-be-all approach to student success, but a better way to prepare failing students for academic success from high school into their early college years. If these implementations are utilized from high school into college, urban students will have a better sense of academic preparedness and an overall fundamental understanding of college life; which may include test-taking and note-taking skills, college-level writing, along with preventive subject-matter barriers and how to effectively communicate academic difficulties and concerns to college staff and teachers. Overall, these implementations will lessen the drop-out rate beginning in high school into college, adding to college matriculation.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- How old are you?
- How do you identify yourself: Male, female, non-binary or binary?
- What are your preferred pronouns?
- What college/university do or did you attend (including city and state)?
- During your high school years into college, how many family members were there in your household?
- Are you from a low-income family?
- Are you from a single-family home or were you raised by both parents?
- What was your relationship with teachers and counselors in high school?
- What is your relationship with college teachers and counselors in college?
- Are you a part time or full-time student?
- Are you attending courses online or a traditional setting?
- Were you required to take placement tests?
- How did you do on your placement tests?
- Do you have any remedial courses?
- What courses are you experiencing the most academic difficulty?
- Were college-level courses offered to you in high school?
- What is your relationship with family members? Are they supportive of your education?
- What was/is your GPA in high school and college?
- Did you have access to a computer lab in high school?
- What were your perceptions or challenges in high school and college?
- Are you receiving any special services or tutoring in college? If so, what are they?
- Are you currently working while attending classes?
- What is your college major? When do you plan to graduate?
- Are you experiencing any issues or concerns with graduating as planned? If so, what are those issues?
- Are you aware of the resources offered in your college?
- Is this your first or second year in college?
- What has been your greatest success in college?
- What kind of challenges have you experienced while attending community college?
Interviewer: How have you responded to these challenges?
- What kinds of opportunities and/or supports have been available to you since being enrolled in this institution?
- How many years have you been a student in this college?
- Tell me something about your college experience. What made you decide to choose this college for your academic studies?
- Are you on track to complete your degree plan as scheduled? Who/what has helped you to stay on track? If not, what has contributed to that?
- What role do you think your instructors/professors play in your coursework?

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- Do you feel that you are able to pass your courses and complete your degree? Where does that feeling come from?
- Do you attend classes regularly as scheduled? Why do you think that is the case?
- How many hours do you dedicate to your academic studies each week?
- What other things do you think could enhance your college experience? What role might your advisor or teacher play in this?
- Do you plan to pursue graduate study courses in the future?
- Is there anything concerning your academic experiences that you would like to add that we have not discussed?

Appendix B: Perspective Participant Recruitment Letter

Researcher Request for Study

Dear Perspective Participant

My name is Fashawn Jones and I am a Doctoral Candidate at DePaul University. As part of my capstone project, I am studying the lived experiences of undergraduate community college students from marginalized communities. I am currently seeking volunteer participants for my study to discuss the unique needs and experiences that college students encounter during their undergraduate college years. Participants are not under any obligations to continue any portion of the interview process and can drop all processes at any time.

I am aware that undergraduate students from marginalized communities may have a differing college experience than their middle-class counterparts, and my goal in this research is to draw out a narrative that would explain the experiences of this specific student group within higher education. Quite specifically, I am seeking undergraduate community college students currently attending college courses from ages 18-24 years of age. These participants should be considered low-income households and attended high school in marginalized, low-income households from 2009-2013. Eligible participants must identify as low-income undergraduate students in their freshman or sophomore year of college that are from a marginalized, low-income community.

This research is voluntary and your participation in this research is strictly confidential. The research will involve one 60-90-minute interview and will occur within the next few weeks to a month time period. If at any time during the interview you feel uncomfortable, you are not required to continue the interviewing process. If you know someone that fits the criteria of this research interview and are willing participants, please forward this recruitment letter to them and have them contact me at jonesfashawn@yahoo.com or by calling (262) 800-2425.

Thank you very much for your interest in participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Fashawn D Jones
DePaul University

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Vita

Fashawn Dionne Jones was born in Chicago, IL on December 21, 1967. She left high school in 11th grade to raise her young children, but later returned to complete her high school equivalency degree from Kankakee Community College in 1992, as a nontraditional student. Fashawn graduated from Gateway Technical College in Racine, WI with an A.A.S in Supervisory Management. She then graduated from Upper Iowa University with a B.S. in Business Human Resource Management. She received her M. Ed. From Upper Iowa University in 2013. She became an Administrative Coordinator at DePaul University Egan Office for Urban Education and Community Partnerships at the Steans Center in Chicago, IL from 2015-2017. She is currently a member of Kappa Delta Pi, pursuing her Doctorate in Education Leadership at DePaul University in Chicago, IL, graduating in June 2020. In her spare time, Fashawn assists underserved students in her community with tutoring needs and college writing skills.