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Title: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study:  The Lived Experiences of First

Generation College Students in the 2012 Cohort at a Traditional Undergraduate

University.


Abstract approved:


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For students who are first in their family (first generation college students) who attend college, access does not equate with success.  They do not graduate from college at the same rate as their non-first generation peers.  The purpose of this study was to examine the essence of the lived experiences of first generation college students at a traditional undergraduate university.  The aim was to understand their college experiences including student engagement, and the effect of student engagement on academic success and persistence.  A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was taken to gain a deep understanding of the essences of the everyday experiences of first generation college students at The University.  Data collection for this study included interviews, member checking, and a researcher's journal.  This study determined that for the first generation college students in this particular setting, the number one factor that contributed to student engagement was making connections.  Students made these connections with friends, faculty, staff, and the university.  The factors that contributed to academic success for first generation college students are discussed.  Additionally, the practical implications of this study are considered.

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study:  The Lived Experiences of First Generation

College Students in the 2012 Cohort at a Traditional Undergraduate University.

By

Karen A. Deighan

A DISSERTATION

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APPROVED


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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of

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my dissertation to any reader upon request.


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Karen A. Deighan, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

There has been little change in the retention and degree completion rates of college students in the last forty years (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Close to one third of all college students do not return for a second year (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). About forty percent of all students who enter college their freshman year will not earn a degree during their lifetimes (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). There is a gap between the retention rate of students whose parents went to college and students whose parents did not go to college (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001). Students whose parents did not go to college graduate at a much lower rate than their peers (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011). These students are at a disadvantage when they go to college and experience college differently, which makes them a population at-risk (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Students who are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college and get a bachelor's degree or higher are defined as first generation college students (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). Whereas students who have one or more parents who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher are non-first generation college students. From this point forward, first generation college students will be known as FG college students and non-first generation college students will be known as non-FG college students.

A student who persists in college is one who enrolls and continues to remain enrolled until he or she obtains a degree (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Across

all types of institutions, FG students persist at lower rates than their non-FG peers

(Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001). The

experiences that students have in college affect their persistence (Braxton et al., 2014).

In order to be successful in college, all students need to understand the role of

being a college student (Collier & Morgan, 2004). The transition to college is more

challenging for FG students than for non-FG students (Clark, 2005). FG students have

a more difficult time understanding their role in college and the impact on their

success (Collier & Morgan, 2004). FG students go to college and experience more

academic, social, and cultural challenges than their non-FG peers; they are less

academically prepared for college and as a result they are less likely to be

academically and socially engaged in college (Chen, 2005). This disengagement leads

to lower persistence rates (Chen, 2005).

FG students benefit more from college experiences, specifically their academic

experiences (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Positive academic

performance and persistence define success in college (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins,

2012). However, it is believed that the ultimate success can be characterized by

graduating from college (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). When FG students have

positive academic experiences in college, this has a positive effect on their persistence

(Pascarella et al., 2004).

Although there are a multitude of reasons why an FG college student may not

persist to graduation, the education of their parents is the biggest risk factor, even

when taking other influences into account; these factors include: FG student's

academic preparation, their parent's income, the influence of FG's peers, and the

involvement and expectations of the parents of FGs (Horne & Núñez, 2000).  FG

students are often from lower socio-economic (SES) backgrounds (Davis, 2010;

Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).  FG students from low SES families are not as likely to be

engaged in academic and social experiences (Engle &Tinto, 2008). These students do

not graduate from college at the same rate as their higher SES peers (Bowen, Chingos,

& McPherson, 2009; Braxton et al., 2014**;** Chen & St. John, 2011).  Braxton et. al

(2014) theorize that students from lower SES have lower levels of engagement and

lower levels of institutional commitment and this negatively impacts their persistence

(Braxton et. al., 2014; Chen & St. John, 2011).

Kuh (2001) defines engagement as the energy and time that students invest in

activities.  Due to family and work demands, FG students are more likely to be

disengaged academically (Kuh, 2008). This has a direct impact on their academic

success and persistence (Kuh, 2008).  Additionally, FG students are less likely to be

socially engaged  (Billson & Terry, 1982; Engle & Tinto, 2008).   Being socially

engaged is as equally important as academic engagement (Tinto, 1987).  When FG

students interact with their non-FG peers, FG students improve their motivation,

intellectual development, degree plans, and personal growth (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Interactions between the faculty and students both inside and outside the

classroom are critical to retention (Tinto, 2006).  When students have interactions with

faculty, their persistence in college is positively impacted (Braxton et al., 2014;

Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012: Tinto, 2006).

However, FG students are less likely to develop relationships with faculty members

and are less likely to perceive faculty as being interested in them (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).

Additionally, FG students are less likely than non-FG students to seek and approach faculty and ask for help (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007).  Despite this, FG students' interactions with faculty are important to their success (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994).  Faculty can provide support to FG students when FG students lack the support from their parents and peers (Blackwell and Pinder, 2014).

What happens once students get to college affects their persistence and graduation rates more than the factors that got them to college (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, 1996;). However, there has been little research on the college experiences of first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).  Research is warranted to lead to the discovery the lived experiences of FG students and the relationship between their academic engagement and success.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the essence of the lived experiences of FG college students at a traditional undergraduate university, henceforth called The University.  The aim was to understand their college experience including student engagement, and the effect of student engagement on academic success and persistence.  The study collected the stories of students and captured the essences of their experiences.

**Research Question**

This study was devoted to understanding the essence of the lived experiences of first generation college students in a rural setting by examining this question:

*What are the lived experiences of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort*

*at a traditional undergraduate university?*

The sub-questions of this study were:

1. What are the factors that contribute to student engagement of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?

2. What are factors that contribute to the academic success of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?

3. What are the factors that contribute to the persistence of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?

**Methodology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a research method by which the researcher studies people (Van Manen, 1990).  The goal is to gain a deep understanding of the essence of everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990).   The goal of this research project was to tell the stories of the participants and make interpretations of those stories (Van Manen, 1990).  Van Manen (1990) provides a structure for hermeneutic phenomenology:

- Choosing a phenomenon of interest;

- Research lived experiences;

- Reflect on themes;

- Describe the phenomenon through writing;

- Remain connected to the phenomenon; and

- Balance the part and the whole.

**Setting**

The setting for this research study was The University, a four-year, public, liberal arts university in New England.  The University is a coeducational, residential university.  Close to one third of the students who attend The University are first generation students.

**Sample**

The sample included students who had completed their third year at The University.  Those students have remained enrolled at The University for the last three years. They were students who are first in their family to attend college with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The first step in collecting data was to select the participants through a purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Creswell, 2007).  The researcher obtained a list of 173 FG students who had completed their third year at The University. After, several emails asking for participants and a significant wait time, thirteen FG students who had completed their third year were selected.  The researcher contacted the participants to arrange a convenient time to meet or Skype for an interview.  During the interviews, the researcher took field notes and observational notes.  The interviews were audio recorded.  Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the conversations and then sent the transcripts to the participants for member checking (Creswell, 2007).  Once the researcher received the transcriptions back from the participants, the researcher analyzed the data, assigned codes to phrases and sorted the codes into themes. Once the themes were identified, the researcher sent the themes to

the participants. The participants confirmed each of the themes. Finally, the researcher wrote up the findings. The process of analyzing the data was done using the hermeneutic circle, where the data was visited and revisited repeatedly (Van Manen, 1990).

During the writing phase of this research, the data was often revisited. The researcher would write, reflect, and then look through the transcripts. Revisiting the data also included reviewing the codes and themes. The purpose of this was twofold. First, to make sure nothing was missed and second to uncover any hidden meanings and understand the data at a deeper level.

**Rationale**

For the purpose of this research project, the researcher looked at the Fall 2012 undergraduate cohort at The University. This cohort had the same first year retention rate (73%) for both FG students and non-FG students (Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, January 20, 2015). Researchers (Engle & Tinto, 2008) indicate that FG students are four times as likely than non- FG students, to leave college after their first year. Additionally, researchers (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, 1996; Tinto) indicate that what happens in college is more important than what happens before. Therefore, this research is warranted.

**Role of the Researcher**

As an undergraduate, the researcher was a FG student at a coeducational, residential university. The researcher did not return to this college after her freshman year. She was a *stopout*: a student who does not take a traditional path to a degree

(Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  She took some time off and then returned to college as a commuter several years later.

Although it was important that the researcher view the experiences of FG students at The University from a new and fresh perspective, at times it was difficult for the researcher to fully put aside any biases or assumptions. The researcher kept a reflective journal in which she engaged in a process of self-reflection and considered both her experiences and those of the participants (Laverty, 2003).  Additionally, the researcher recorded thoughts and observations about the participants. This journal helped the researcher with the interpretation of the lived experiences of FG students.

**Assumptions**

It was the assumption of the researcher that it was going to be easy to find 12 students among the population of 173 first generation, third year completers at The University. It turned out that it was not easy to find the 12 students.  It took many emails to get students to respond.  The researcher ended up selecting the 13 students who did respond to her emails and who were willing to participate in the interviews.

It was unknown if the students would be hesitant or forthcoming in their willingness to speak to the researcher.  The researcher had planned to work hard to develop a rapport with the participants and used probing questions in order to discover the essence of the lived experiences for FG students at The University.  With the exception of one student, all of the participants were forthcoming and eager tell their stories.  Although the researcher attempted to build rapport and used probing questions with that one student, the student continued to give short answers and did not expand on them.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

    **Academic Capital**. Academic capital is simply the knowledge that students need in order to be successful in an academic setting.

    **Academic Self-efficacy**. A student's belief in his or her ability to do activities and other tasks in order to be successful in school is known as academic self-efficacy (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008).

    **Cultural Capital**. Cultural Capital is the collection of cultural experiences such as ideas, beliefs, material objects, and mannerisms belonging to a culture of people and can be used to maintain and advance a students' social status  (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

    **First Generation College Students**. This term refers to students who are first in their family to attend college, with neither of their parents having a bachelor's degree or higher; they are defined as first generation students (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008).  In this paper they are referred to as FG college students. Students with one or more parents who went to college and earned a bachelor's degree or higher are known as non-first generation college students and then later referred to as non- FG college students.

    **Persistence**. In this study persistence is going to mean continued enrollment at the same institution for at least three years.

    **Retention**. Retention is remaining enrolled in college.

    **Self-efficacy**. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1977).

**Social Capital**. Social Capital is the sharing of information and resources via a social network (Bourdieu, 1986).

**Stopout**. When a student takes begins college and then leaves and returns at a later time they are considered a stopout (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

**Student Engagement**. Student engagement can be defined as the time and energy students invest in activities (Kuh, 2001). Students can be socially engaged; this is the time and energy they devote to social activities. Students can be academically engaged; this is the time and energy they spend on educational activities.

**Success**. In this study, success is defined as enrollment in an institution of higher education, persistence beyond the third year, and levels of student engagement. The level of student engagement that needs to be present will include either academic engagement or social engagement. Students may have one or the other and be stronger in one than the other.

**Transfer Student.** A transfer student is one who begins at one university and then within four years transfers to another university (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

**Chapter Two**

**Literature Review**

Not all students who enter college will graduate.  Approximately forty percent of students who enter college their freshman year will not earn a degree during their lifetimes (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), almost 50% of the population of college students have parents who did not attend college.  Students who have parents that did not go to college do not graduate at the same rates as their peers (Chen, 2005; DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001).  These students are a population at risk (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of students who are first in their family to attend college, to look at their daily experiences and examine the factors that contribute to their engagement and success.  This chapter two will provide the literature review for this study covering the following topics: current status, retention theories, college choice, family, academic culture, social capital, cultural capital, persistence, and student success.

There are many terms used to describe a college student's behavior as it relates to retention; three key terms include persistence, transfer students, and stopout. Persistence is when a student enrolls in college and continues to remain enrolled until he or she obtains a degree, within two or four years (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  The term *transfer student* refers to students who begin at one college and then at some point during their four years transfer to another college (Habley, Bloom, &

Robbins, 2012).  A student who is considered a *stopout* is a student who begins college and then leaves for any reason and returns to college, thus taking more of a nontraditional path to degree completion (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

Students who are first in their family to attend college, with neither of their parents having a bachelor's degree or higher, are defined as first generation students (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). These students are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college. Non-first generation students are students with either parent having attained a bachelor's degree or higher. From this point forward, first generation students will be known as FG students and non-first generation students will be known as non-FG students.

For students who are first in their family to attend college, access does not always result in success (Stebleton & Soria, 2012).  As we look at the data, historically, FG students have not persisted in higher education at the same rate as non-FG students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001).  All types of institutions, including public universities, private universities, and other religious 4-year colleges report gaps in the retention rates of FG students and non-FG students, with FG students graduating at a lower rate than non-FG students (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011).  The following statistics clearly convey the gap between the retention rates of FG students and non-FG students.

- Close to half (43%) of FG students leave college before obtaining a degree, compared to 20% of non-FG students (Chen, 2005).

- Low-income FG students are four times more likely than their non-FG peers (26 percent versus 7 percent) to leave college after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

- Fewer FG students (27.4 % compared to 42.1%) earn a bachelor's degree after four years, compared to their non-FG peers (DeAngelo et al., 2011).

The gap in the persistence rates of FG students compared to non-FG students can be attributed to many factors. Although personal attributes differ from student to student, FG college students can be grouped into similar categories and they face many of the same challenges (Davis, 2010). FG students are more likely to be ethnic or a minority and are generally older than continuing-generation students (Davis, 2010). They are more likely to live at home or off-campus and are more likely to take fewer credits per semester (Davis, 2010). Additionally, FG students may be married, have children, be employed, attend college less than full-time, and be less involved in college activities (Hodges-Payne, 2006). FG students are often from low-income families (Davis, 2010; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Although they are less likely than their non-FG peers to complete a degree, persisting through graduation and obtaining a degree is a proven path to improving FG students' economic status and quality of life (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001).

Despite the challenges that FG college students have persisting to graduation, many do persist (Chen, 2005; Lightweis, 2014). Student engagement has a direct impact on the persistence of FG college students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tinto, 1987). Many questions still exist, such as: What is the lived experience of successful, FG college students in a rural setting? What are the factors that contribute to student

engagement of FG students?  What are the factors that contribute to the academic

success of FG students? For this study, success will be synonymous with persistence.

      As educators we do first-generation students no great favor should they

become – out of their own unawareness– confused, frightened, and alienated,

only to drift away and drop out.  If we– faculty, administrators, and support

staff- mean for them to stay and not become attrition statistics, we need a

keener understanding of the sensibilities and concerns they bring with them

and of the difficulties they encounter along the way (London, 1968, p.168).

### Current Status

FG students make up to 50% of the population nationally at colleges and

universities (Engle & O'Brien, 2006; NECS, 2010; Stuber, 2011).  However, only

73% of FG students return to college their second year (Stuber, 2011; Stebleton &

Soria, 2012).  Additionally, FG students graduate at a lower rate than their non-FG

peers (Engle et al., 2006).  FG students and non-FG students face similar challenges

when going to higher education including adjusting to college and general academic

anxieties (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella,  & Nora, 1996).  Despite their

similar challenges, the persistence of FG students to non-FG students is not

comparable (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Although FG students are getting into college, they are not staying due to

many factors.  FG students face a number of academic barriers to success (Engle &

Tinto, 2008, Jehangir, 2010).   Additionally, FG students face numerous challenges to

degree completion, such as:

- Lack of support from home (Petty, 2014).

- Working more hours, which leaves less time for studying (Petty, 2014).

- FG students have lower educational aspirations than non-FG students (Engle

  & Tinto, 2008; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

- FG students do not have the same level of information about degrees,

  availability of resources, and academic preparation as their non-FG peers

  (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

- FG students are less likely to engage academically and socially in college

  (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Courses that are taken the first year of college have a direct impact on the completion of a degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005). When students take lighter academic loads in their first year, it prolongs the time it takes to earn a degree and is associated with attrition (Chen & Carroll, 2005). FG students take fewer academic hours their first year than non-FG students, 18 credits compared to 25 credits (Chen & Carroll, 2005). FG students also have a lower first-year grade point average than their non-FG peers (2.5 versus 2.8) and this persists through their college years (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Additionally, FG students prefer vocational and technical fields to academics and, as a result, take fewer courses in math, science, and humanities (Chen & Carroll, 2005).

### Retention Theories Past and Present

As the retention, persistence, and completion rates of FG students are considered, the overall work of retention theorists may prove to be beneficial in helping to understand the issues related to FG students. Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1987) seminal work on theories of retention created a foundation, which precipitated

research on retention for more than three decades. Tinto (1987) suggests that what

happens after students get into college matters more than how they got there or what

happened before they got there.  Tinto (1987) defines integration as transitioning and

becoming assimilated into college. According to Tinto's Retention Theory (also called

Tinto's Integration Theory), the level of students' integration is directly related to their

persistence (1987). He theorizes that the higher the levels of integration, both

academically and socially, the more likely students are to persist (1987).  However, he

believes that students do not have to be both academically and socially integrated at

the same rate into college. Academic integration can be stronger than social

integration or social stronger than academic; one will compensate for the other (Tinto,

1987).

Astin (1984) expanded on Tinto's (1975) work, to include a developmental

theory of student involvement.  This theory emphasized students' involvement in

college, which included academics, participation in extracurricular activities, and

interacting with faculty (Astin, 1984).  He defines student involvement as studying,

spending time on campus, and interacting with faculty (Astin, 1999).  According to

this theory, there is a direct relationship between involvement and learning (Astin,

1984).

The more students are academically integrated into college, the better chance

they will feel like they belong (Bean, 1985).  The sense of belonging in college is

known as *fit* (Bean, 1985). Bean (1985) theorized that when students have good study

habits, have confidence, and a connection to faculty, their academic ability is

enhanced, which in turn will positively influence their academic fit.  Students are more

likely to feel like they fit, if they believe they share values with other students (Bean, 2005). When students feel like they fit in college, the result is improved academic and social integration (Bean, 1980). Increased integration and a feeling of fit lead to improved retention (Bean, 1985).  Bean (2005) later expanded his belief on retention to include the importance of students interacting with their peers and the faculty. Additionally, the more committed a student feels to his or her college, the more likely they are to persist (Braxton et al., 2014).

There are two general attitudes important for persistence and eventual retention:  "attitudes about attachment to the institution and attitudes about being a student" (Bean, 2005, p. 219). Institutional commitment describes the attachment between the student and the college they are attending (Bean, 2005). However, fit has a social component and is connected to social integration (Bean, 2005).

Following Tinto (1975, 1987), Astin (1984), and Bean (1985), researchers continued to theorize about retention.  When students do not attend the college of their first choice, they have a lower level of institutional commitment and this has a negative impact on their persistence (Braxton et al., 2014).  Students leave college for many reasons, some of which include lack of financial resources, poor institutional fit, medical reasons, being academically unprepared, and little motivation. Tinto (2006) concludes that the interaction in the classroom between the faculty and the students is critical to retention. Tinto (1993) theorized that different groups of students have different characteristics and different needs and therefore require different retention interventions.  He also contended that different types of postsecondary institutions

require different types of retention policies and programs because colleges attract

different population of students (Astin, 1990; Tinto, 1993).

Alacron and Edwards (2013) found that students' abilities and motivation are

key factors associated with retention.  However, motivation is more crucial than

ability (Alacron & Edwards, 2013; Solberg Nes, Evans, & Segerstrom, 2009). If

students have academic ability but little motivation, they are less likely to persist in

college (Alacron & Edwards, 2013).  Additional student qualities that have positive

effects on retention are being dependable, organized, and responsible (Alacron &

Edwards, 2013).

## Factors Associated with College Choice

For most students, the decision to attend college is a process and part of that

process is gathering information long before entering college (MacAllum, Glover,

Queen,  & Riggs, 2007; National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007).

Students go through three stages when choosing a college: predisposition, search, and

choice (Cabera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallaher, 1987).  The research suggests

that students generally go through this process at different rates.  Predisposition, the

first phase, is when students develop educational and career aspirations and begins to

think about where they will attend college (Cabera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler &

Gallaher, 1987).  During the search phase, students research college and look at

different institutions (Cabera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallaher, 1987).  Finally,

during the choice stage, students will decide whether or not they will attend college

and where they will go (Cabera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallaher, 1987).

However, for FG students this process looks very different; they combine the search

and choice stages and focus on one or two colleges (NPEC, 2007).

Applying to college is a complex process for students (Nagoaka, Roderick, and Coca, 2009). All students can benefit with help from their parents and other adults when applying to college (Nagoaka et al., 2009). However, providing help to FG and non-FG students should be different. Although FG students may be academically qualified for college, they face numerous barriers to college enrollment (ICES, 2008). These barriers include insufficient financial resources, mixed messages about academic preparation, not understanding the admission and financial aid application process, and limited community encouragement (ICES, 2008). It can be more difficult for FG students because their parents did not go to college (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boal, & Duron, 2013; Nagoaka et al., 2009).

The level of education that parents have affects their children's likelihood to enroll in college (Choy, 2001). Only 54% of FG students enroll in college immediately after finishing high school, compared to 82% of continuing-generations college students (Choy, 2001). Parents play the strongest role in choosing a college for both FG students and non-FG Students (NPEC, 2007). However, FG students do not have the information needed for applying and paying for college due to lack of experience by parents (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). MacAllum, et al. (2007) suggest that the parents of FG students are not helpful to their children in the college search. The parents of the FG students do not know what information to seek or where to get it (MacAllum, et. al., 2007). FG students are not able to benefit from their parents' experiences and this puts them at a disadvantage (NCES, 2012).

For FG students the college choice is more of an event than a process; the

decision to go college happens close to the same time that they choose a college

(NPEC, 2007).  Due to their lack of experience, the parents of FG students are unable

to help their children with the process of planning for college (Horn & Núñez, 2000).

As a result students get the help from teachers and counselors in their school.

**Family**

The higher the parent's level of education, the more likely a student is to enroll

in college (Horne & Núñez, 2000).  For FG students, going to college is not part of

their family's tradition, they are actually breaking, not continuing, family tradition and

this creates disconnect within the family (Terenzini et al., 1994).  Parental

involvement has a positive effect on aspirations of FG students (McCarron & Inkelas,

2006).

In a study done by Hodge & Mellin, (2010), they concluded that the families of

FG students motivated their children directly and indirectly to attend and perform well

in college.  Hodge & Mellin (2010) discovered the following reasons to explain FG's

motivation:

- students wanted to achieve more than their parents

-  students felt the need to support their families

-  FG students felt their families had high expectations of them

- students wanted to get a good paying job.

Some FG students feel stress as a result of the high expectations put on them from

their parents. FG students who have support of their parents are better able to make

decisions for themselves and those who do not have support do not have goals and

were less likely to make good personal decisions (Hodge & Mellin, 2010). FG

students who felt support from their parents have better decision-making abilities and
FG students who felt they lacked support do not set personal goals (Hodge & Mellin,
2010).  FG students are not as academically prepared as non-FG students and FG
students lack academic support from their parents (Hicks, 2007). The primary way that
parents do help their FG students is by providing them with encouragement (NPEC,
2007).

FG students and non-FG students who have family support about college are
more successful in college (Hicks, 2006).  Parental support includes involvement and
encouragement for their children's educational development (McCarron & Inkelas,
2006). Research (Hicks, 2006) indicates that many FG students do have support from
their parents.  However, due to their lack of experience in higher education and
knowledge of resources, it limits parent support (Hicks, 2006).  FG students and non-
FG students who have family support about college are more successful in higher
education  (Hicks, 2006).  Researchers Wang & Castañeda-Sound (2008) found that
when FG students perceived a high level of support from their family, it lowered their
stress. Additionally, lower levels of support were directly related to higher levels of
stress.  Conversely, in non-FG students the level of support from their family did not
have an impact on their stress in college. Wang & Castañeda-Sound (2008)
hypothesize that FG students have separated from their family and look to their peers
and faculty from the college for support.

Olson (2014) hypothesizes that what appears as FG's parent's lack of support
may be the parents wanting to support their student's independence.  The level of
education that parents have has an effect on students' academic, social, and cultural

capital.  For FG students this can affect their persistence in college.

**Academic Capital**

High school students, whose parents have no college degree, have more stress in their lives and are less hopeful than students with more educated parents (Finkelstein, Kubzansky, Capitman, & Goodman, 2007).  Additionally, FG students do not leave high school as academically prepared for college as non-FG students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Due to their parents' lack of a college degree, FG students do not hear stories about college, appropriate ways of dealing with professors, and have no parental coaching (Collier & Morgan, 2004).  Horn and Núñez (2000) postulate that although they needed more help with college choice, FG students did not receive any more help than their non-FG peers.  This puts them at a disadvantage right away.  Even when they are academically prepared, FG students are still less likely to apply to college (Horn & Núñez, 2000).  Horn & Núñez (2000) suggest the reason is due to lack of enough information from parents and school professionals.

**Social Capital**

Social capital is defined as the resources and social support based on a students' network of relationships, which enable the students to be successful (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Many students have the need to socially belong and fit in (Petty, 2014). If students feel socially isolated, their college experience will be less enjoyable (Martink, 2009).  FG students spent fewer hours studying and spent more hours working off-campus then non-FG students (Terenzini et al., 1996).  They were also more likely to live off-campus and this has a negative effect on their social capital (Terenzini et al., 1996).

**Cultural Capital**

Related to social capital is cultural capital. Cultural capital is defined as cultural experiences that are educational and can be used to maintain and advance students' social status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Braxton & Hirschey, 2005). There is a positive connection between cultural capital and persistence in college (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005).  Conversely, students with lower levels of cultural capital are less likely than students with higher cultural capital to persist (Braxton et al., 2014).

The parents of non-FG students, who are college-educated, give their students cultural capital (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2013).  FG students lack cultural capital and background information about college, which impacts their success.  FG students find themselves having to interact with two cultures: home and school (Jenkins et al., 2013).  FG students' parents are less educated and as a result are more likely to be employed in manual labor and retail sales jobs (Jenkins et al., 2013). When FG students go to college they are immersed into the academic culture with their non-FG peers and educated professors (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012). Collier & Morgan (2008) claim that even when FG students go to college as academically prepared as their non-FG peers, their lack of cultural capital puts them at a disadvantage.

<div align="center">

**Academic Capital**

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**Academic Preparedness**

When a student's academic preparedness for college matches their college choice, their retention rate is positively impacted (Mattern, Shaw, & Kobrin, 2010). In

a study conducted by Light and Strayer (2000), it was discovered that there is a direct correlation between student ability and the quality of the institution that they choose to attend. Students with high levels of ability and who attend an equally high-quality college are more likely to graduate from college (Astin, 1971; Light & Strayer, 2000). If a student wants to succeed in college, he or she needs to be academically prepared and choose the most academically selective institution to which they are accepted (Mattern et al., 2010). FG students only look at one or two choices when deciding to go to college and they are less likely to choose the most academically appropriate college for them (NPEC, 2007).

**Academic Self-efficacy**

Student's personal growth begins with their belief in their ability to succeed (Bandura, 1977). A students' belief in his or her ability to accomplish a task is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory, if a student has low self-efficacy, they will put less effort into the activity about which they have low self-efficacy.

Academic self-efficacy is a student's belief in his or her ability to do activities and other tasks in order to be successful in school (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008). High academic self-efficacy is directly related to high academic achievement (Choi, 2005). The researchers theorize that students with a higher level of self-efficacy do not see challenges as insurmountable and leads to higher persistence rates (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). A student's belief in his or her ability to be successful is more powerful on his or her achievement than anything else, such as SAT scores or high school grades (Gerardi, 2005).

In a study done by Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols (2007), the researchers surveyed FG students and non-FG students in the fall and the spring of the same academic year. The results showed that FG students have a lower self-efficacy than non-FG students. Self-efficacy is more of an important predictor of academic adjustment for FG students than for non-FG students (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012).   FG students are at risk for attrition and therefore factors such as academic self-efficacy and self-regulation skills will impact their success.

Studies (Pascarella et al., 2004; Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008) show that FG students reported lower levels of academic self-efficacy than their non-FG peers. FG students who are the most academically prepared are still less likely than non-FG students to enroll in college, 13% compared to 1% (Horne & Núñez, 2000). In a study conducted by DeFreitas and Rinn (2013) it was concluded that when FG students believe in their ability to do academic work, their academic achievement is positively affected.  This study shows that when FG students have little confidence in their ability to do academic tasks such as writing, reading and/or solving math problems, they perform lower on academic assignments (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013).  Conversely, the study found that FG students, who had a higher belief in their ability to do language and mathematics, had higher academic achievement (DeFreitas, & Rinn, 2013).  Academic self-efficacy influences FG students' determination to maintain a higher grade point average that allows them to stay in college and persist to graduation (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010).  In order for FG students to persist in college they need to believe in their ability to succeed (Gerardi, 2005). Even if FG students are motivated, if their self-efficacy is low, they are less likely to succeed (Aspelmeier et

al., 2012).  Any interaction between students and the faculty will increase their

academic self-efficacy is likely to lead to persistence (Bean, 2005).

**Academic Integration**

Academic integration includes being assimilated into the various components

of formal education such as classroom activities (Tinto, 1987).   The more time a

student puts into his or her academics, the more he or she will be successful and

academically integrated into college (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). FG students

are less likely than non-FG students to be academically integrated as a result of family

and work demand. FG students are likely to be less academically engaged which has a

direct impact on their academic success and persistence (Kuh, 2008).

FG students' academic experiences in college differ from non-FG students and

as a result face additional barriers to success (Terenzini et al., 1996).  Results from the

National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), spanning 3 years, 18 four-year colleges

in 15 states with over 2000 students, found that compared to their non-FG peers, FG

students had different curricular, instructional, and out-of class experiences.  They

took more technical courses and fewer credit hours (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Exposing FG college students to their non-FG peers gives them a better

understanding of what it takes to be a successful academically integrated student

(Pascarella et al., 2004).  Observing non-FG students studying and participating in

other academic behaviors such as speaking up in class and interacting with faculty,

contributes to FG students' academic success (Pascarella et al., 2004). FG students

benefit more than non-FG students from being academically engaged in the classroom

(Pascarella et al., 2004).  For example, writing term papers or written reports, reading

books that were not assigned, and the effort and involvement they put into classroom

activities (Pascarella et al., 2004).

These benefits (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 280) include the following:

improved critical thinking skills, improved writing skills, an openness to diversity,

learning for self-understanding, finding an internal locus of attribution of academic

success, a preference for higher-order cognitive tasks, and plans for degree completion

(Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 280).

Pascarella et al. (2004) theorize that FG students benefit more than non-FG

students from their academic experiences in college because they begin their academic

career academically behind that of their peers.  These new academic experiences

contribute to their cultural capital, which enriches their college experience and leads to

success (Pascarella, 2004).

FG students generally have lower academic performance. Researchers have not

discovered a reason why FG students have poorer academic performance (DeFreitas &

Rinn, 2013).  However, they hypothesize that the reason for lower academic

achievement could be that they have lower academic self-concepts than their non-FG

peers (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013).

## Social Capital

FG students benefit from social interactions with non-FG students (Pascarella

et al., 2004).  These social interactions enhance FG students' motivation, intellectual

development and personal growth (Pascarella et al., 2004). A study done on FG

working class white males, shows that social capital is more valuable for FG students

than it is for their non-FG peers (Moschetti & Hudley, 2008). First generation college

students are less likely to assimilate their diverse college experiences (Pike & Kuh,

2005b).  The results of the study by Pike & Kuh (2005b) conclude that the reason for

FG students being less likely to assimilate to college is due to their perception of lack

of support in their educational environment.  FG students also reported that they made

less progress in their learning (Pike & Khuh, 2005b).

For FG students who lack the social capital needed to be successful in higher

education, merely attending college helps them to develop social capital (Coleman,

1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).   Vygotsky's Theory of Social Development (Vygotsky,

1978) supports the belief that students can learn from one another.  Therefore, FG

students can learn from their peers.   FG students benefit more than non-FG students

from peer interaction (Pascarella et al., 2004). Non-FG students understand the culture

of higher education and its role in their personal development (Soria & Stebelton,

2012). It is important for FG students to have the support of their peers in order to be

assimilated into college (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008).

Olson (2014) proposes that FG students may be cognizant of their non-FG

peers who have not succeeded in college. If FG students do not create formal and

informal social networks of support, they will be less likely to be engaged and it will

negatively affect their persistence (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).  Research (Blimling, 1993)

shows that living on campus has a positive influence on learning and educational

aspirations.  Living on campus puts FG students in close physical proximity with their

non-FG peers, giving them numerous opportunities, on a daily basis, to meet and

interact with their peers (Billson, 1982).

## Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is defined as the collection of cultural experiences that can be used to maintain and/or advance a student's social status (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Lower levels of cultural capital are connected to lower levels of engagement and institutional commitment (Braxton et al., 2014). Cultural capital may include social events such as attending concerts, museums, sporting events, and parties.

There are four principles linking cultural capital and persistence (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005):

- Colleges, which have the highest cultural capital, also have the highest retention rates (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005).

- Students who have more cultural capital are more likely to persist in all types of institutions (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005).

- Students with higher levels of cultural capital are more likely to persist at colleges with higher levels of cultural capital (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005).

- Students with low levels of cultural capital are more likely to persist at colleges with low levels of cultural capital (Braxton & Hirschey, 2005).

FG students do not have cultural capital like their peers of non-FG students (Jenkins et al., 2013). The parents of non-FG students have been able to share their experiences of the culture of college including academic and social skills that are

crucial to persistence in college (Jenkins et al., 2013). FG students need to understand the expectations of the faculty and the institution; they need to learn how to be a student.

Collier and Morgan (2004) believe that all students need to understand the role of being a college student in order to be successful in higher education. They ascertain that all students need to have an explicit understanding of course content and an implicit understanding of how to meet the expectations of their professors (Collier & Morgan, 2004). FG students have a more difficult time conceptualizing implicit understanding of their role in college than their explicit understanding and this impacts their success (Collier & Morgan, 2004).

**Persistence**

In a study by Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) comparing the persistence of FG students and non-FG students, the authors found that although female students were the majority of FG students, they were less likely than male FG students to persist. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) suggest that gender-based inequities still exist in educational opportunities. They also found that persistence is enhanced for first-generation students at larger institutions. They hypothesize the reason for the higher persistence could be that it is easier for students to find other students with similar backgrounds at a larger institution with a diverse population. However, in reference to engagement, Kim (2009) found that challenges can be worsened by enrolling in a large university. Much of the research, which examines student engagement and persistence, is based on single institution studies and limits their generalizability to specific institutions or institutional types (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea,

2008).

The interactions between faculty and students have a positive impact on persistence (Soira & Stebelton, 2012).  Faculty, in comparison to any other employee, has the greatest impact on student persistence in college (Bean, 2005).  It is "difficult to predict and directly control" persistence (Braxton et al., 2014, p. 211).

FG students' senses of belonging are positively associated with academic engagement (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).  Lohfink and Paulsen's 2005 study comparing FG students and non-FG students reported that participating in school clubs was positively related to persistence for non-FG students but not for FG students.  Faculty who help FG students' sense of belonging affect their academic engagement and ultimately their persistence (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

**Student Perspective**

The student's decision to depart from college or stay is based on five perspectives (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  These include sociological, psychological, organizational, economic, and cultural.  The main sociological perspective is Tinto's Integration Theory (1975), which focuses on students' academic and social integration affecting success.  Academics and motivation are crucial components of psychological perspectives (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Organizational perspectives include the quality of colleges and the opportunities made available to their students (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Economic perspectives include both monetary and the cost of staying in college as opposed to leaving (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  Finally, cultural perspectives encompass the

diversity of students entering college and cultural factors impacting student

persistence (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

Chen and St. John (2011) examined the relationship between students'

socioeconomic status (SES) and their persistence rate. Their study confirmed that

students with a higher SES have a 55% better chance, than students with a low SES, to

persist. Students with a lower SES do not graduate at the same rates as their higher

SES peers (Braxton et al., 2014; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Chen & St.

John, 2011). Braxton et al. (2014) suggests that students from lower SES have lower

levels of engagement and lower levels of institutional commitment, which negatively

impacts their persistence (Braxton et al., 2014).

Bean (2005) finds that there is a relationship between money and retention.

Students from middle class or upper class homes are more likely to possess high levels

of social and cultural capital. They are also more likely than students from lower SES

to feel like they fit in college (Bean, 2005). Additionally, students from lower SES

backgrounds are at risk for attrition (Braxton et al., 2014). Since FG students are more

likely to be low SES, this puts them at risk for attrition (Davis, 2010; Blackwell &

Pinder, 2014).

According to a study conducted by Engle and Tinto (2008), FG students from

low SES families are not as likely to be engaged in academic and social experiences.

The authors suggest this is likely due to their lower level of academic preparation and

their obligations outside of college, such as work and family. Therefore, FG students

are less likely to be academically and socially engaged (Engle & Tinto, 2008), which

is needed to foster success in college (Braxton et al., 2014; Tinto, 1987).

The theory of student persistence in residential colleges and universities relates to the characteristics the student goes to college with, and the experiences the student has in college (Braxton et al., 2014). Students need to have psychosocial engagement devoting time and energy into their social life at college (Braxton et al., 2014).  They must also become socially integrated and be committed to their college, which has a positive effect on persistence (Braxton et al., 2014).

Both Braxton et al. (2014, 2004) and Tinto (1975, 1993) believe that persistence is a longitudinal process. From Tinto's Integration Theory (1975), Braxton et al. (1997; 2014) extracted thirteen themes:

1. **"**Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution" (Braxton et al., 1997, p. 75)**.**

2. **"**Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college" (Braxton et al., 1997).

3. "Student entry characteristics directly affect the student's likelihood of persistence in college" (Braxton et al., 1997).

4. "Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration" (Braxton et al., 1997).

5. "Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration" (Braxton et al., 1997).

6. "Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration" (Braxton et al., 1997).

7. "Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration" (Braxton et al., 1997).

8. "The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college" (Braxton et al., 1997).

9. "The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution" (Braxton et al., 1997).

10. "The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment" (Braxton et al., 1997).

11. "The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation" (Braxton et al., 1997).

12. "The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college" (Braxton et al., 1997).

13. "The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college" (Braxton et al., 1997).

Tinto's theory (1975) was tested and revised by Braxton et al. (2014). As a result eight themes emerged as follows:

- The more a student believes that they have the ability to pay for the college of their choice, the higher their level of social integration.

- The student's level of social integration will be higher if the student perceives the institution is committed to them.

- When students perceive the potential for community on campus, they have a higher level of social integration.

- The students' level of perception of integrity of the institution affects their

  level of social integration.

- The more students use strategies to adjust to college, the higher their level of

  social integration.

- The more energy that students put into their social interactions at college the

  higher their degree of social integration.

- The higher the students' level of social integration, the more they are

  committed to the college.

- The higher the level of student commitment to the college the more likely they

  are to persist in college (Braxton, 2014)**.**

Research has shown that social integration and persistence are connected (Braxton et al., 2014; Braxton et al., 2005).  Student's interactions with their peers positively affect their academic learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).  In order to persist, students need to experience academic success (Roberts & Styron, 2010).

**Student Success**

Indicators of student success in higher education include enrollment in an institution of higher education, grades, persistence to the second year, and length of time needed to attain a degree and graduation (Venezia, Callan, Finney, & Usdan, 2005). Academic engagement and social engagement are indicators of student success. Student engagement includes academic engagement and social engagement. Academic engagement includes involvement in classroom activities. Social engagement incorporates being involved in activities, clubs, and or sports on campus.

For the purpose of this study student success is defined as enrollment in an institution of higher education and persistence beyond the third year.

Much of the literature (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Stebleton, & Soria, 2012) implies that being a FG student is a risk factor for attrition. Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliot, and Pierce (2012) theorize that being a FG student is more of a sensitizing factor rather than a risk factor because FG students have an internal motivation for success which amplifies both their positive and negative attributes of being a FG student.  FG students accrue positive benefits more than non-FG students when they have positive experiences and are more negatively impacted when faced with hardships (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012).

Some say the ultimate success is defined as graduating from college (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  There are assumptions that go along with this; the first being that obtaining an education is linear; that a student must attend a single institution from enrollment to graduation (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  The second assumption is that all students enter college with the desire to get a degree (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).  Although many students go to college with the goal of obtaining a degree, some have other educational objectives (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

**Conclusion**

The transition to college is more challenging for FG students than for non-FG students (Clark, 2005).  FG students have academic, social, and cultural challenges (Clark, 2005).   FG students are less academically prepared for college and go to college with less social capital, compared to non-FG students (Chen, 2005).  As a

result they are less likely to be academically and socially engaged in college (Chen, 2005). This disengagement results in lower persistence rates (Chen, 2005).

Researchers Horne & Núñez (2000) found that even when taking factors such as parent's income, parent's education, involvement, expectations, academic preparations, and peer influence into account, the biggest factor in the success and persistence in higher education of FG students was parents' education (Horne & Núñez, 2000).

It is difficult for first-generation students to become immersed into college cultures. They do not have the skills to do it and they do not attempt to (Darling & Smith, 2007). If first-generation college students become immersed into the culture of college both inside and outside of the classroom they have fewer challenges and are more likely to succeed (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Longwell-Grice, 2003).

More important than the size of the institution and how students got to college, what happens once students get to college affects their persistence and graduation rates (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, 1996). However, there has been little research on the college experiences of first-generation students (Pike & Kuh 2005b). Research is warranted to understand the lived experiences of FG college students.

**Chapter 3**

**Introduction**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored and described the lived experiences of first generation college students at a traditional undergraduate university.  The college students in the study were students who were first in their family to attend an institution of higher learning with neither of their parents having earned a bachelor's degree or higher.  From this point forward first generation college students will be known as FG college students.  The phenomenon of the lived experience of FG college students was the focus of this study.  This chapter outlines the methodology, the purpose of the study, research questions, methods, data collections and analysis for this research project.

**Methodology**

In conducting research, it was important to investigate multiple options for carrying out the research both to find the optimal method and to discredit the other methods (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).  There are two general approaches to collecting and reporting data:  quantitative and qualitative.  The quantitative approach collects, analyzes and interprets numerical data (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002). The qualitative approach explores a phenomenon with unknown variables (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).  In order to decide which approach is best, it is necessary to let the research question guide the approach (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).  The quantitative approach focuses on statistics whereas the qualitative approach focuses on words (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002).  For the purpose of this study a qualitative approach

was used because the goal was to obtain the stories of the lived experiences of FG college students.

A qualitative study can be carried out in a multitude of ways (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). When choosing the appropriate method for this current study, five approaches, as outlined by Creswell (2007), were considered: narrative research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, case study research, and phenomenological research.

1. Narrative research conveys the detailed stories or life experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative research includes either written or spoken text (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2007). The researcher collects stories from the participants, describes the experiences, and chronologically orders the meaning of the experiences (Creswell, 2007). In this type of research, the researcher needs to obtain extensive information about the participants and have a deep understanding of the context of the participant's lives (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2007).

2. Grounded theory research attempts to discover a theory (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall& Rossman, 1989). Individuals in a grounded theory study have shared a common experience, are interviewed and, from their responses, the researcher generates a theory (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher needs to avoid using any known theories and let a theory emerge from the data (Creswell, 2007).

3. Ethnographic research concentrates on an entire cultural group (Creswell,

2007).  The researcher observes and interviews the participants (Creswell, 2007; Marshall& Rossman, 1989).  It is important for the researcher to become immersed into the daily lives of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Collecting data in an ethnographic study is time consuming and the results are usually written in a narrative form (Creswell, 2007).

4. Case study research involves studying an issue through one or more cases and  can involve people, programs, or activities (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 2009; Yin, 2013).  Interviews, observations, and documents are examples of data collected in a case study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 2009; Yin, 2013). It is important to collect enough data to gain a detailed picture of the case (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 2009; Yin, 2013).

5. Phenomenological research reports on the meaning of lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).  The researcher describes what all of the participants have in common and how they experience the phenomenon  (Moustakas, 1994).  Following this description of the data is a report detailing the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).  This report is a description of the phenomenon not an examination or an analysis of the issue (Moustakas, 1994).

It was determined that phenomenology was the preferred method for answering the question, *what are the lived experiences of FG students in the 2012 cohort at a traditional undergraduate university?*  All of the participants in this study shared in the experiences of being FG students.  The descriptions of those experiences were written using a phenomenological approach**.**

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a description of the quality and the meaning of a lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2007) and Merriam (2009) describe two methods of phenomenological research focusing on the lived experiences of individuals: phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology tells the stories of individuals (Creswell, 2007). However, the researcher does not interpret, but describes the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). The hermeneutical approach tells the stories of individuals and makes interpretations of their stories (Van Manen, 1990).

**Transcendental phenomenology**. Transcendental phenomenology is a "scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994**,** p. 49). The emphasis of transcendental phenomenology is on perception and discovering the essence of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1965). However, when conducting transcendental phenomenology the researcher must put aside any prejudgments or preconceived knowledge from his or her past experiences and look at the situation with fresh eyes and without bias (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests three general steps when undertaking transcendental phenomenology research:

1. The first step is *epoche*. In this first stage, the researcher puts aside everything they know about the phenomenon and looks at the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

2. *Transcendental-phenomenology reduction* is the second step. In this stage, each experience and the phenomenon being studied is considered

separately and given equal merit. This is often referred to as bracketing and

horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994).

3. The third step *is imaginative variation*. The goal of this stage is to describe

the meanings of the experiences and descriptions of the phenomenon

(Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) contends that it is human nature to formulate an opinion and

to make assumptions about people and experiences. When one perceives something,

they take it as true (Moustakas, 1994). Despite this, Moustakas postulates that when

conducting transcendental phenomenology, these assumptions must be put aside in

order to focus on the object being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**. In hermeneutics, the researcher looks at the

phenomenon and the parts of the phenomenon being the problem, interpretation and

application (Dobrosavljev, 2002). "Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science

which studies persons" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 6). The goal of this type of research is to

gain a deep understanding of the significance of everyday experiences (Patton, 2002;

Van Manen, 1990). These everyday experiences are those that have been lived

through (Van Manen, 1990). There are six research activities, as outlined by Van

Manen (1990), which provide structure for hermeneutic phenomenological research:

choosing a phenomenon of interest, research experiences as they are lived, reflect on

themes, describe the phenomenon through writing, remain connected to the

phenomenon, and balance the part and the whole. The activities are explored in depth,

as follows:

**Choosing a phenomenon of interest**.  A real person is conducting the

research of the phenomenon and it is subject to the interpretation of that person (Van

Manen, 1990).  "Lived experience is the starting and the end point of

phenomenological research" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 36).  It is important to go beyond

simply recalling the experience, it needs to be done in such a way that it can be

explained and understood (Van Manen, 1990).

Once the phenomenon has been identified, a research question is formulated

(Van Manen, 1990).   Van Manen (1990) postulates that the nature of

phenomenological research lends itself to the question, *what is the lived experience?*

The purpose of this type of question is to spark an interest in the reader and to help

connect the audience to the research (Van Manen, 1990).  The question helps to

provide a sense of wonder in the reader (Gadamer, 1975).

**Research lived experiences**. "Phenomenological research is descriptive and

focuses on the structure of experience, the organizing principles that give form and

meaning to the life world" (Laverty, 2003, p. 5).  In hermeneutic phenomenological

research, the researcher must be cognizant of their own experiences in order to orient

themselves to the phenomenon being researched (Van Manen, 1990; Vagle, 2014).

"Any phenomenon is a possible human experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 58). When

the researcher examines the experiences of others, it helps the researcher understand

their own experiences (Van Manen, 1990).  These experiences become the data of the

research and the emphasis is on the meaning (Van Manen, 1990).

There are three main methods to get at the meaning: interviewing, observation,

and other literary sources.   Interviewing is an effective tool to delve into the meaning

of the lived experiences of individuals (Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990). The

interviewer gathers information through direct contact with the participants, in a

narrative form with the goal of understanding the phenomenon.  The interview also

serves as a method to engage in conversation with the participant (Van Manen, 1990).

Although a survey asking the participants to write can be effective, it is not as

effective as the interview because when participants write, they are more likely to be

reflective (Van Manen, 1990).   When participants are reflective it is more difficult to

account for the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).

The second method of getting at the meaning is observation, where the

researcher has indirect contact with the participants and gathers anecdotal stories of

what is being observed (Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 1990).  During observations and

while collecting anecdotes, it is important to "develop a keen sense of the point or

cogency that the anecdote carries within itself" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 69).

The third preferred method examining lived experiences is through literary

sources including diaries, journals, logs, and art (Van Manen, 1990).  The researcher

needs to be careful when using the written sources as they may be reflective and not a

direct account of the lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

**Reflect on themes**.  In order to fully grasp the meaning of the lived

experience, the researcher needs to work directly with the lived experience data and to

continually reflect and clarify meaning (Van Manen, 1990). To fully understand the

phenomenon, it is necessary to interpret the data (Laverty, 2003). This meaning is

complex and has many layers and when these layers are analyzed, themes emerge

(Van Manen, 1990). Themes describe the phenomenon of the lived experience (Van

Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) describes three methods for uncovering themes: to look at the text as a whole and isolate phrases; reread or listen to the narrative several times and be aware of essential statements; and finally to look at every single statement and consider its connection to the phenomenon. When uncovering themes, the goal of the researcher is to delve into the deep meaning of the experience as realized by the participants (Kafle, 2011).

**Describe the phenomenon through writing**. The researcher writes the narrative stories of the participants. Through the writing and rewriting of these stories, the researcher is compelled to reflect on the stories, interpret the themes and communicate this new knowledge. The writing includes anecdotes, observation, and themes of the lived experiences of the participants.

Writing about the phenomenon often includes anecdotes, which are narrative stories (Henriksson & Saevi, 2012; Van Manen, 1990). Anecdotes can help to uncover the many layers of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). When the researcher weaves the anecdotes into the text of the research paper, the writing becomes more powerful (Van Manen, 1990).

The writing also includes observations and themes that emerge as a result of this study. The observation includes the field notes and the researcher's journal. The researcher collates all of the data and presents it as implications for future study.

**Remain connected to the phenomenon**. Van Manen (1990) writes about four conditions that need to be present when doing phenomenological research**.** First, the researcher needs to be aware and continuously connected to the life of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). "To be oriented as researchers means that we do

not separate theory from like, the public from the private" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 151).

Second, the researcher's writing, reading, and speaking needs to be strong (Van

Manen, 1990). Each statement that is written or read needs to be considered connected

to the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). Finally, the text needs to have depth (Van

Manen, 1990). "Depth is what gives the phenomenon or lived experience . . . its

meaning and its resistance to our fuller understanding" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 152).

**Balance the part and the whole**. Van Manen (1990) recommends that the

researcher consider the many components of the research project including the setting,

the participants, and the writing. The part can be one component of data, the whole

being all of the data. Both are equally important. The researcher needs to find

approaches and procedures that are best suited to the project (Van Manen, 1990).

There is no specific research process to follow and the process that the researcher

chooses should be more organic to the project (Van Manen, 1990). However, the parts

and the whole must be identified when carrying out phenomenological research

(Gadamer, 1976). When the emphasis of understanding is placed on the parts, the

whole, and the relationship between the two, this is identified as *the hermeneutic*

*circle* (Patton, 2002).

**Hermeneutic Circle**

In hermeneutical phenomenological research, the analysis of data is often done

using the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1953; Kafle, 2011; Patton, 2002). The circle

involves reading, reflecting, writing, and rewriting (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi,

2012; Laverty, 2003). From this process, meaning is construed (Laverty, 2003).

"Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are

constructing this world from our own background and experiences" (Laverty, 2003, p.

2).   The meanings are often hidden and need to be uncovered and interpreted as part

of the process (Finlay, 2012).

Laverty  (2003) contends that in hermeneutic phenomenology one visits and

revisits experiences in an effort to clearly understand the meaning and possible

uncover new meaning. Heideggar (1953) argues that anything one experiences is

ultimately connected to their background understanding. "The biases and assumptions

of the researcher. . .  are embedded and essential to the interpretive process" (Laverty,

2003, p 6). The hermeneutical process involves moving from parts of the process, to

the whole process, and back and forth repeatedly, in order to increase the

understanding of the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The hermeneutic circle can be interpreted as gears in motion, with each gear

affecting and depending on the others.  In analyzing, interpreting, and reporting on the

dialogue and text of the research, the parts and the whole of the phenomenon need to

be examined.  Although the researcher does not let his or her bias and attitude

influence the interpretation of the text, this bias and attitude does need to be

acknowledged because it always there, just under the surface ready to emerge.

The Researcher's Interpretation of The Hermeneutic Circle:



**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the essence of the lived experiences of FG college students in order to understand their stories including but not limited to student engagement and its effect on the students' academic success and persistence. Almost fifty percent the population at colleges and universities (50%) are FG students (Engle & O'Brien, 2006; NCES, 2010**;** Stuber, 2011). Although FG students are getting into college, their experiences do not always result in success (Stebleton & Soria, 2012). FG students are more likely than non-FG students to leave a four-year institution before attaining a degree (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001).

The following factors negatively affect the persistence of FG college students:

- lack of engagement (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tinto, 1987).

- lack of support from home (Petty, 2014).

- work long hours, leaving less time for studying (Petty, 2014).

- have lower educational aspirations than non-FG students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

- unequal levels of information about degrees, availability of resources and academic preparation as their non-FG peers (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

- are less likely to engage academically and socially in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

The following factors positively affect the persistence of FG college students:

- interacting with faculty (Braxton et al., 2014; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tinto, 2006)

- having a sense of belonging (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

- becoming immersed into the culture of college (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Longwell-Grice, 2003).

- engaging in the experience (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tinto, 1987)

It is theorized that what happens once students get to college affect their persistence and graduation rates more than what happened before they got there and how they got there (Terenzini, 1996; Pike & Kuh, 2005b).  The following characteristics indicate success of students in college: enrollment in an institution of higher education, grades, persistence to the second year, length of time needed to attain a degree and graduation (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Venezia, Callan, Finney, & Usdan, 2005). There has been little research on the successful college experiences of FG students (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).

**Rationale**

At a traditional, undergraduate university, a rural university in New England, henceforth called The University, the fall, first time, full time 2012 cohort, consisted of 930 students: 248 FG students, 357 non-FG students and 289 unknown, no parent data for either parent (Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, January 20, 2015).  Of the 248 FG students, 208 (73%) returned for the fall 2013 (Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, January 20, 2015). However 73% (261) of the non-FG students also returned for the fall 2013 (Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, January 20, 2015).  According to Engle and Tinto (2008) FG students are four times more likely than their non-FG peers to leave college after their first year.  However, as indicated above, at The University, the first year retention rates of FG and non-FG students were the same. Researchers (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, 1996; Tinto, 1987) theorize that what happens in college is what is more important than how the students get there and there has been little research on the college experiences of successful FG students **which substantiates the need for this study**.  Soria and Stebleton (2012b) noted, "we encourage scholars to pursue qualitative studies that explore the lived experiences of first generation students to learn more about their journeys (p. 683).

**Research Questions**

The overarching question for this study was the following:  *What are the lived experiences of FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?*

The sub-questions for the study were:

1. What are the factors that contribute to student engagement of the 2012 cohort
   of FG college students at The University?

2. What are factors that contribute to the academic success of the 2012 cohort of
   FG college students at The University?

3. What are the factors that contribute to the persistence of the 2012 cohort of FG
   college students at The University?

**Methods**

This researcher was interested in the lives of students, it made sense to take a

hermeneutical phenomenological approach to the research (Moustakas, 1994; Van

Manen, 1990).  This hermeneutical research project investigated, described, and

interpreted the lived experiences of thirteen students in the 2012 cohort of FG students

in a rural New England college setting (Van Manen, 1990).  The goal was to examine

the college experiences of these FG college students at The University and to provide

a comprehensive description of their experiences.

The research question *what are the lived experiences of FG college students in the*

*2012 cohort at The University?* was best examined using a hermeneutical

phenomenological approach.  The researcher examined a number of FG students'

shared experiences in college  (Creswell, 2007).  The phenomenon that was studied

was the lived experiences of FG college students.

**Population and Setting**. Purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Creswell, 2007;

Patton, 2002) was used to select students who had achieved a level of success in

higher education, as indicated by their continued enrollment, characterized as students

who were first in their family (FG students) to attend college, and who were in their

third year at the institution of higher education. Participants were chosen because they were the best people to define an understanding of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of FG students (Creswell, 2007). They were students who were first in their family to attend college with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

The participants in this study were limited to FG students in the 2012 cohort and who attended The University. The University is a four-year liberal arts college in New England. It is a coeducational, residential university. The fall 2012 new first-time, full-time cohort at The University contained 930 students: 248 FG students, 357 non- FG students and 289 unknown (no data reported for either parent). The participants for this study were chosen from this pool.

**Data Collection.** Data collection for this study began as soon as the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the work. The IRB  (see Appendix A) ensured that the participants in the study were treated in a safe and ethical manner and that the research was valid and carried out in a responsible manner (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).  Data collection included interviews and field notes. The following steps to collect data occurred:

1. The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs at The University was contacted via email asking for access to the email list for first generation, third year completers at The University (see Appendix B).

2. Next, the researcher emailed the entire 2012 cohort of first generation students at The University (see Appendix C) in an effort to identify FG students who

may be interested in participating in the study. Contact information was
collected from the students who responded to the email.

3. The researcher had to continuously email the students over the summer. As
   the students responded to the emails, the researcher collected contact
   information.

4. The researcher arranged a convenient time for the participants to complete the
   interviews.

5. The researcher answered any questions the participants had, discussed the
   release form, and arranged a time and place to meet for the interview in person
   or via electronic means.

6. After the researcher collected the data, conducted member checking and
   interpreted the themes, the researcher contacted the participants to verify the
   themes.

**Interviews**. Interviews are an effective method for gathering large amounts of data
from a wide selection of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Stufflebeam, &
Shinkfield, 2007). Conversational interviews were conducted at a prearranged time
and location. It is recommended by Polkinghorne (1989) that researchers in a
phenomenological study interview from five to twenty-five individuals who have all
experienced the phenomenon. The researcher interviewed thirteen FG students from
the 2012 cohort at The University. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face
or via electronic means. A descriptive interview was conducted and audio recorded.
The interviews were conversational and the questions were open-ended (Moustakas,
1994).

Research question: *What are the lived experiences of FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?*

The following interview questions were asked of the participants:

1. Please tell me about how you decided to come to The University.

2. Please describe your first year at The University.

3. Please describe your most memorable experiences at The University.

4. Please tell me about your interactions with faculty at The University.

5. Please describe some of your experiences with your peers at The University.

6. Please feel free to share anything that has come to mind as a result of our conversation.

The following clarifying or probing questions were needed in order to fully explore the phenomenon of lived experiences:

1. Please describe your experience in the classroom.

2. Please describe your experience outside of the classroom.

## Anecdotal Stories

Anecdotes are the most common way people share stories in every day life (Van Manen, 1990).  It was expected that in response to the open-ended research questions, the participants will have stories to share.  These stories or phenomenological anecdotes of the lived experience of FG college students were transcribed from the interviews. In research, anecdotes are a methodological device used to make information clearer (Van Manen, 1990).  Anecdotes unveil the layers of

the lived experiences and are "concrete demonstrations of wisdom, sensitive insight,

and proverbial truth" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 120).

**Data Analysis**. Data analysis is a process of formulating, organizing, and

analyzing the data (Creswell, 2007).  Hermeneutic analysis is this process of

formulating and organizing the data in a repetitive manner (Miles, Francis, Chapman,

& Taylor, 2013).   It is a reflective process where the researcher continually questions

their own experiences and beliefs and those of the participants (Debesay, Nåden, &

Slettebo, 2008). "This methodology asserts that individual people are a unique as their

life stories" (Miles, Francis, Chapman, & Taylor, 2013, p. 409).

Following the interviews, the researcher personally transcribed the audio

recordings. Then, the researcher revisited the recordings and reviewed the

transcriptions for accuracy.  Once the interviews were typed, the researcher conducted

member checking for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).   Member checking is the

process of bringing the data back to the participants so they can judge accuracy and

credibility (Creswell, 2007).  The transcripts were emailed to the participants and they

were asked to review them**.** The participants were asked to clarify any misconceptions

and they were invited to include any additional information they feel is pertinent.

Once the researcher received the transcribed interviews and any comments back

from the participants the data were coded.  It was necessary for the researcher to

classify, sort, and arrange the data in order to fully understand and uncover the

essences of the lived experiences of the 2012 cohort FG college students at The

University.  The researcher adopted Creswell's (2007) method for analyzing the data,

as follows:

1.  The personal experiences of the FG students were described.

2.  Following the description, a list of significant statements was created.

3.  The significant statements were grouped into themes.

4.  A description of the experiences with quotes by the FG students was written.

5.  A structural description was written, including the context of the experiences.

6.  Finally, the essence of the lived experiences was documented.

## Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (2000) and Patton (2002) suggest using triangulation as a method for validation in research.  Triangulation is a method of using different sources of evidence to elicit similar themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  Triangulation serves as a measure of validity because it relies on more than one form of evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  For this research project field notes, interviews, member checking, anecdotes, and a researcher journal served as the data.

The data from this research was triangulated; using interviews, member checking, anecdotal stories, and field notes to explore and describe the lived experiences of FG students at The University.

There were two lenses that were used to verify the validity of the research: that of the researcher and that of the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  The researcher decided how many times to revisit the interview transcripts both by speaking with the participants and by reviewing the data until it was felt that the data was saturated enough so that themes or categories emerged (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  The other lens is that of the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The participants participated in member checking and also verified the themes.

To address the reliability or the credibility of this research project, thick, rich descriptions defined the setting, participants and the themes in detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A thorough description with as many details as possible was provided. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest including statements "that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study" (p. 129).

## Limitations and delimitations

All studies have the potential for weakness and limitations. One limitation of this study is that it was a time consuming process of collecting and analyzing data. This study looked at one group of students in one setting and it may not be generalized to other settings. Also, the results could have been affected by researcher bias, as the researcher was a FG student. Delimitations include using students who have completed their third year in college and this may limit the scope of the study because the results may not be transferred to a similar population, context, or setting.

## Summary

This study was designed to investigate the lived experiences of the 2012 cohort of FG college students at The University. A quantitative approach was ruled out in favor of a qualitative approach because the researcher was interested in the stories of the students. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experiences of FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University. The methodology described in this chapter is determined to be the best method to attempt to answer this question.

A purposeful, criterion-based sample was chosen: students who are first in their family to go to college, have been continually enrolled, and are students in their third year.  Interviews were conducted and transcribed.  In addition to the interviews, anecdotal stories, member checking, and field notes triangulated the data. The participants reviewed the transcriptions.  From the transcriptions, significant statements were highlighted and used to write a description of what the participants experienced.   From the descriptions, the researcher then wrote a composite description that conveyed the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

**Chapter 4**

**Findings**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of first generation college students in a rural setting.  The FG college students in this study attend The University, a coeducational, residential university. The goal of this study was to understand their college experiences including student engagement, academic success and persistence. The research questions that directed this study were:

- What are the factors that contributed to student engagement of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

- What are factors that contributed to the academic success of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

- What are the factors that contributed to the persistence of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

This chapter reports on the demographics of the FG college students and how the data was collected.  It begins with a brief description of how the students chose The University and concludes with the findings obtained from thirteen in-depth interviews. It also tells the stories of the participants and makes interpretations of those stories (Van Manen, 1990).

**Description of the Sample**

The participants in this study are students who have completed their third year at The University.  They have been continually enrolled at The University and are considered to have achieved a level of success based on their status as a current

student at The University.  Each of the students are first in their family to attend

college with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree or higher.  The sample

size was thirteen participants: eleven female and two male.   The participants (see

table 4.1) came from both out-of-state and in-state, with six of the students coming

from out of state and seven of the students coming from the state of The University.

Most of the students used the Writing Center for support their freshman year

and almost half of them used the Office for academic support their freshman year.

The Writing Center offers short and long-term tutors to help students with the writing

process and editing. The Office houses TRIO: a federal program serving first

generation students, low-income students, and students with disabilities.  The Office

provides tutoring, mentoring, and academic support for students.

Table 4.1

Demographics of Interviewed First Generation College Students

| What is the student's name? | What is the gender of the student? | Did the student come from instate or out of state? | Did the student work their freshman year? | Did the student use the Writing Center? | Did the student use The Office? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sarah | Female | Instate | Yes | Yes | No |
| Mia | Female | Instate | Yes | Yes | No |
| Katie | Female | Out of State | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Michelle | Female | Out of State | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Stacey | Female | Out of State | Yes | Yes | No |
| Andre | Male | Out of State | No | Yes | Yes |
| Amy | Female | Instate | Yes | No | No |

| Ethan | Male | Out of State | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|-------|------|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Angel | Female | Instate | Yes | Yes | No |
| Kay | Female | Instate | No | No | No |
| Ava | Female | Instate | Yes | Yes | No |
| Kathy | Female | Out of State | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Taylor | Female | Instate | Yes | Yes | No |

**Sample Selection**

The sample size for the population of first generation students at The University was 173 third year completers.  This potential sample size was too large to interview each participant.  Therefore, to make the size more manageable and add credibility to the sample, purposeful was used to establish an interview pool (Creswell, 2007).  All 173 FG college students were contacted and 13 students responded.

Following the approval of the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher obtained a list of 173 names of FG college students of the 2012 cohort at The University.  The researcher emailed all students (Appendix B) from the list. Within one week, five students responded to the initial email and the others trickled in. It was necessary for the researcher to continue to email all 173 students.  In total, the researcher sent out five emails in an effort to get enough students to ensure an adequate sample size to enhance the credibility of the study. As the participants contacted the researcher, the researcher immediately responded to them and arranged a day, time, and method for the interview most convenient for the participants.

In an effort to increase the reliability and validity of this study, the researcher had intended to collect a list of twenty students, randomize the list of names and contact the twelve names on the top of the list. However, due to the difficulty in getting a significant number of participants to respond and after a significant wait time, the researcher contacted the participants who did respond. The researcher sent out another email to the remaining students. A limit to this study may be that the participants in this study were the only students who responded to the researcher's email. The researcher did not have to turn anyone away.

**Students' Profiles**

Although Sara is a senior at The University and enjoys it, The University was her last choice when selecting a college. Sara financially supports herself with no help from her parents. When she applied to college, she did so on her own. Her major is biology and she wants to have a career in animal science, possibly with the Fish and Game Department.

> Umm, well I am from the area, so I went to [local high school] and originally
> The University was like absolutely not even on my map I was like I am not
> going to The University. Like, I am not going to stay in town. I wanted nothing
> to do with it. And then senior year I ah applied to all my schools and got into
> all my schools and then like two months before I graduated my parents
> divorced. . . I just like last minute choose to go to The University. It was
> instate, it was cheapest instate. It was close to the area with everything else
> going on. . . my thought when I originally applied was that I would just come

here for a couple of years, get like all my gen eds and then I could transfer.

And honestly, I've ended up liking it.

Mia is an art major at The University and is in her senior year. The University was not Mia's first choice for college. She applied to an Art School and could not afford the tuition, so she applied to The University based on the affordably of the college. Her dream job is to become a developing sketch artist for a major cartoon company.

I applied to many schools but the New England Institute of Art was my favorite, because I loved the campus, and I am an art major. When I saw the financial aid package I knew I couldn't afford it. I came to The University with my mom to see the college. My tour guide was awesome. I just fell in love with the place, both the campus, the surrounding area, and the people really made me feel like The University was like home.

Katie is an out-of-state, senior at The University. She is an athletic training major. She applied to The University along with her friend; they both had the same major and wanted to go to the same school. Both Katie and her friend got accepted into The University and currently attend the university.

Umm well my friend and I were looking at schools together. And this is one we both wanted to go to and they had a really good athletic training program. So it was one of those things where I wanted to do athletic training and my best friend was going here, so it was one of those things, and it wasn't too far away from home and it wasn't too close.

Michelle is an exercise and sports physiology major at The University. Michelle is sports player and was looking for a college where she could play her sport. The second criteria that she had when looking for a college was the school had to have a physical therapy program.

One of the main reasons why I began looking into college is because I wanted to play [a sport] in college. So The University gave me the opportunity to be able continue my dreams of playing college [sports]. Also give me the type of major that I was looking for. I was looking for a science major when I first came in. I was looking for something in physical therapy even though The University didn't have a program and they still don't have a program for physical therapy.

Stacey is a certified part-time fire fighter, majoring in criminal justice. She began looking at colleges her junior year and visited four schools both in her state and out of state. She had originally settled on a school closer to her home and had one more appointment scheduled to tour The University and she ultimately decided on The University.

I looked at KN and I loved it. And I told my mom that I hoped The University sucked because I couldn't see myself going anywhere else. But I had this appointment scheduled to come here the next week so I came anyway and I told my dad I have no idea why I though KN was awesome. Like I just loved

The University. . . I think it is the students. Umm, I never have met somebody

that is unfriendly.

André is biology major in his senior year at The University. André received an

academic scholarship to attend The University. He applied and got into two colleges:

one near his home and one out of state. He chose to go to The University to have a

new experience.

I had two choices it was The University for biotechnology or it was URI for

pharmacy. And I choose The University's biotech program over the pharmacy

program just because I wanted a new experience. I wanted to get out of [state].

I wanted to get out of P Town. I wanted to venture out and see the world.

Amy lives close to The University and due to the proximity, applying to The

University was her last choice. She applied to six different colleges and ended up

choosing The University. Her major is social work and when she graduates wants to

work with people.

I applied to six different schools and believe it or not, The University was

actually my last choice because it was closest to home. I was like, 'Well, I kind

of want to be further away and everybody seems to go to The University', so I

was like, 'I'll just look at the other schools.' I looked at all the other schools

and I had a week to decide. I was like, 'I don't know what school I want to go

to,' so I was like, 'fine, and I'll just go to The University.' I went to The

University and fell in love with the campus.

Ethan is an out-of-state student in his senior year at The University. His major is elementary education. After he graduates from The University, he is considering staying on to get his Master's Degree. When looking at colleges, he hadn't considered The University because he didn't know about the school. His cousin encouraged him to look at the college.

> I didn't even know that it existed, until my cousin came here and she played women's ice hockey for the team, and she's just like, Ethan, I know that you're busy with your college searches and everything, but what you should really do is come check out The University, cause I came up here for a sport and have loved it ever since, and I think that this would be a great place and a great fit for you. Then, I came up here and visited in about, March, it was a little bit above the norm, it was 70 degrees in March, but non-the-less, it was still sunny, and it was the only college that I had visited that was sunny, and it was just a good omen for that day.

Angel was advised by her high school guidance counselor to apply to the school of her choice because she had a "100% chance of getting in." However, Angel did not get into that school and at the last minute applied to The University and got accepted. Initially, she did not want to go to The University because she felt like everyone she knew went there. "I fell in love with The University. Because I went from not wanting to be here at all, to no wanting to leave." Angle is a communications major at The University.

Kay is a senior at The University majoring in nursing.  When looking at schools, Kay only looked at in-state schools and looked for a school where she could play a sport.  Kay loves to travel and when she graduates wants to become a traveling nurse.

Well, we were looking at schools in the state; I didn't really want to go out of state. Actually a big part of it was because I played a sport, and I wanted to play here. It didn't end up working out, but it worked out for the better because I love my program.

Ava looked at three state schools and chose The University for her higher education degree.  She chose The University based on location and finances.  She is majoring in psychology with a minor in professional communication and gerontology. She is not sure what she is going to do after she graduates from college and is hoping that an internship in the spring of her senior year will help narrow down her options.

It was in the perfect location . . .I wanted to stay in a state school because I knew it would be less expensive for me. . . since my parents haven't gone to college, they don't have those high CEO paying jobs so I can't afford Harvard. Plus it was close enough where I could go home whenever I wanted, but not so close that my parents could just pop up unannounced. It was just location pretty much.

Kathy is an out-of state student attending The University.  She is a senior majoring in Elementary Education.  When looking at colleges, Kathy had applied to different schools in three different New England states.  Her mother encouraged her to

give The University a closer look because Kathy's aunt had attended school at The University.  When Kathy graduates from The University, she will be certified to teach students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade.  She plans on joining the AmeriCorps to obtain experience in teaching and then look for a job teaching on a movie set.

> I ended up applying and then I came to visit, and I was like, oh my god I have to get in here, because I love the campus, the size. I love that it had a skating rink because I figure skate. It just kind of had everything that I was looking for. My aunt had graduated from the same program, so I know it's a good program and it will get me where I need to go.

> Taylor is a 21-year-old, female in her fourth year at The University.  The University was not her first choice in colleges.  She first visited The University as a senior in high school through a program called Upward Bound.  However, after her third visit she was "absolutely in love with it." She *loves* the friends that she has made and the area in general.  Her major is performing arts and dance management; someday she hopes to have her own choreography company.

> I didn't like any of the colleges we went to. I came back again with my mom as a possible candidate for the school that I could get into, and I started liking it a little bit more. Then on the third time I came back here for orientation, I was absolutely in love with it.

**Data Collection**

**Student Interviews**

The researcher conducted a total of thirteen interviews.  The interviews were conversational and open-ended (Moustakas, 1994).  There was a list of questions that guided the researcher (Appendix C).  The researcher used the open-ended questions to help establish rapport with the participants and to gain a deeper understanding of the students' lived experiences.  The researcher's questions were designed to increase the likelihood that the participants would speak freely and share stories.  The stories or anecdotes revealed the lived experiences of the students (Van Manen, 1990).

> Today was my first interview. I am worried that my questions were not specific enough, although I have done the research and this is how the research (Creswell and Moustakas) suggested I formulate them.  Really, the gem was when she said something that prompted me to ask another question and she went deeper.  I thought, oh she wouldn't have said that had I not asked that follow-up question.  The follow up questions are important (researcher journal, July 24, 2015).

Over half of the interviews were conducted at The University's library.  Three interviews were completed via Skype and two were conducted over the phone.  The researcher audio recorded each interview.  Once the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed each interview.  Following the transcriptions, the researcher emailed a copy to the participants for member checking.  As part of the member checking process, the data was brought back to the participants in order for them to assess the accuracy and validity of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  Member

checking was a crucial component to ensure the validity of this research. The

participants then sent the transcripts back to the researcher with any corrections or

additions.

During both the data collection and data analysis phases of this research

project, the researcher kept a journal.  The researcher wrote observations, reflections,

and theories in the journal. Anecdotes, which included behavior and quotes from the

participants, were also recorded in the journal.

## Synthesis of Data

Synthesizing the data includes formatting, organizing, and analyzing the data

(Creswell, 2007). The records and the transcripts were reviewed and revisited to

ensure accuracy.  Member checking was completed to add credibility and reliability to

the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  The researcher coded the data by hand.

The researcher completed the following steps in synthesizing the data:

- Listened and transcribed each interview.

- Sent the transcription to the participants for member checking

- Read through each interview and made notes of things that came to

  mind in the margins of the paper.

- Isolated all phrases and extracted keywords from each phrase.

- Entered all key words into an Excel document.

- Looked for patterns and themes in the Excel document.

- Color coded the phrases

- Grouped the phrases into like categories.

- Counted the frequency of the phrases

- Went back to the transcripts to double-check something was not

  missed.

- Took the data and put it into a table (4.2).

- Compiled a list of themes.

- Contacted all of the participants and asked them to verify the themes.

Table 4.2

Summary of Data

| Theme | Code | Number of Phrases |
|-------|------|-------------------|
| Sense of Community | • I love this place<br>• The University is like home<br>• Friends<br>• Gravitated to like minded people<br>• Everybody is friendly<br>• Met awesome people<br>• Can't leave The University | 17<br>25<br>44<br>29<br>12<br>5<br>4 |
| Faculty Support | • Want to do better because of professor<br>• Know professors outside of class<br>• Asked professor for help<br>• Connection with faculty (not professors)<br>• Liked the small class<br>• "Amazing" teacher<br>• Get to know your professors | 20<br><br>6<br><br>15<br>11<br><br>2<br>31<br>5 |

| Opportunity | • So many opportunities to "do stuff" and get involved | 28 |
|---|---|---|
| The University | • The University wasn't my first choice<br>• Chose due to price<br>• Chose due to location<br>• Roommate didn't workout<br>• Freshman year was hard | 6<br><br>2<br>4<br>3<br>16 |

## Trustworthiness

Triangulation was used for validation in this research (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Patton 2000). Different sources of evidence such as field notes, interviews, member checking, and anecdotes were used to highlight themes. Using all of these methods, the researcher explored and described the lived experiences of FG students of the 2012 cohort at The University. Thick, rich descriptions with details were used to capture the lived experiences of the students (Van Manen, 1990). These descriptions enhanced the credibility and reliability of the research.

The researcher used the hermeneutic circle to analyze the data and ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Heidegger, 1953; Kafle, 2011; Patton, 2002). The circle is comprised of the author's perspective, the text and dialogue, and the parts and whole of the data. The researcher entered the circle and vacillated, reading and rereading, reflecting and reflecting, writing and rewriting (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012; Laverty, 2003). From this process of visiting and revisiting the data, the researcher was able to peel away the layers and unveil a deeper meaning. As a result,

the researcher was able to capture the essence of the lived experiences of the FG

students in the 2012 cohort at The University.

The researcher's hermeneutic circle, from chapter three:



## Essential Themes

The researcher captured the essence of the experiences of FG college students.

It was not the intention of the researcher to prove anything.  Therefore, the researcher

let the themes emerge from the data. Once the themes emerged, the researcher

contacted the participants for affirmation of the themes.  Three essential themes (table

4.2) emerged as a result of a comprehensive synthesis of the data, which included

looking at the parts of the data, the whole data, and going back to the parts.  The three

themes that emerged were:  sense of community, faculty support, and involvement and

opportunity. Sense of community had the greatest number of occurrences, with faculty

support being second and involvement and opportunity being third.

**Sense of Community**. When people feel like they belong to a certain group,

they have a sense of community.  The participants in this study spoke about the sense

of community at The University.  This sense of community included making friends, gravitating towards like-minded people, and The University feeling like home.

All of the participants in this study talked about how important it was to make friends at college.  Taylor commented that college was not all about the classroom, "it is really important to make friends in college".  Stacey felt the same way.

Umm, I think it is really important to make friends in college.  It is not all about the classroom stuff.  Well that is really important, that is the main reason you are here.  It is better to have friends regardless of their major.

Many students who go to college experience homesickness because they miss their family.  For some students this is their first time away from family and away from home.  All of the students in this study stated that making friends filled that gap for them. Angel, Mia, and Kay shared having friends gave them a sense of being at home.  Angel was the first to express these sentiments.

You just always feel like at home. Wherever I go, I'm going to see one of my friends. I can't walk to the ice rink. I can't walk to here or there without seeing 12 people I know. It's like, "Hey, how are you? How is Ellen?"  It's makes it a more comfortable environment seeing your friends everywhere.

"I just fell in love with the place, both the campus, the surrounding area, and the people really made me feel like The University was like home," said Mia.

Kay also feels like The University felt like home:

I've never had any bad experiences, everyone's really nice, that's one of the things I loved. You can just walk around campus and everyone says hi, it's like a small little family. I like knowing a lot of people.

In addition to being away from home and from their families, going to college means going to a new place and possibly not knowing anyone.  At this new place, students may not have a support system right away. Kathy, Ava, and Angel talked about friends being their support system.

Kathy:  "They become kind of like a support. They know everything you're going through because they're probably going through it too. One of my best friends, she's in my sorority as well, she's also in my major and my year. We have all our classes together, and we see each other all the time, but she's knows everything that's going on and she's a great person to bounce things off of."

Ava: "There's always someone who will have your back. If you just have one friend, they're not going to be there all the time. They have their own things going on. They have their own life and things they want to do. It's nice having a lot of friends that you can hang out with all in a group or just say, 'You want to do this one thing?' and then go hang out with someone else."

Angel: "In college, your friends are your team.  Your friends are your family. They're your study buddies. They're your psychologists. They're your

everything. You can't just leave, it's like your kid, you know what I mean? You

can't just leave them in the dust."

Many of the participants talked about having different groups of friends.  Ethan

had different friends each year.  Kay had different groups of friends that she did

different things with.  While some students, like Katie, just made friends in her major.

I've had a different group of friends almost every year it seems like, starting

my freshman year; I'm still friends with the people I was close with then. The

only thing was I got super involved my sophomore year, and they still didn't. I

tried to shake up my friends group a little bit, and tried to hang out with more

people who were involved just like me. Ever since then, the friends that I've

had are even more positive than they were my freshman year, but the

difference is the students that I'm friends with now, peers, they're passionate

about The University, they're involved in a variety of different things on

campus, and they're just like me.

I don't know what I'd do without my friends. Especially, I have my regular

friends that you can just relax with, and I also have my nursing friends, which I

would not have gotten through the summer without them.  We study together,

we'll basically just lock ourselves in our house and be like, okay, I know it's a

Saturday night and we're studying but we have to do it. It's nice having

someone that knows.

Umm, I have all good experiences with umm the people.  I don't go really

outside of like the athletics at The University.  I am friends with almost all of

the athletes.  I'm friends with all the athletic trainers and then it goes from

there.   Like I meet those people's friends. Umm. . . I have never really had a

bad experience with someone form The University.  They are really nice and

close.

Going to a new place and not knowing anyone can often make if difficult to

socialize with others. For some people this can be the difference between going out

and staying in.  Michelle and Taylor both expressed the importance of doing things

with friends.

My friends here are my teammates because I spend so much time with them.

Umm, I obviously have friends in my classes and my friends at the gym that I

work at.  But for the most part the people who I am spending 99 percent of my

time with is my teammates from the second we step foot on campus.

It's not going to be boring if you have friends. If you're in the dorms, they

could be right down the hall. I think it's more overall of an experience if you

have more friends on campus or good friends, not so many more friends, but a

couple of good friends you can go to and play around. If you get in the same

club, you can go to the formals together and you can go out or have get-

togethers with. It just makes it more fun.

Many of the participants mentioned that The University felt like home, like a community, and went so far to say "I love it here" and "I can't leave." Andre commented, "But, umm, first coming to The University, I thought the sense of community was very strong.

Ava substantiated this with the following comment:

It's a nice little community. I love the main street and they always do things to try to make the community come together. They have farmers markets. They have community plays in the amphitheater down by the river. Just the environment itself, being able to go to the park and go through the woods or the pond or just float down the river.

"I fell in love with The University. Because I went from not wanting to be here at all, to not wanting to leave," said Angel.

Michelle, Ava, and Stacey, all said, "I love it here."

**Faculty Support.** Students talked about getting to know professors inside and outside of class. They expressed the importance of being willing to ask the professors for help. They also talked about professors pushing them to do more, and the closeness among themselves, the professor, and their advisor. Students are able to make connections with other faculty.

Katie felt a connection to the professors because they remember her name:

They still remember my name, which is the best part of this school. If you have a teacher your freshman year and you see them your senior year, they still

know your name. They are still going to say hi to you when you see them. I

think that is what is really cool about it.

Michelle expressed gratitude for her professors being willing to help:

I have had to get extra help for that and they are very accommodating. Then,

can I see you Wednesday night? And then maybe Friday? It is awesome that I

can go see them and be like hey, I know I play a sport and I am away, I know I

am missing class on this Thursday, is there anyway like for a couple of hours

we can meet so I can really nail down what I am missing? And even if you

want to meet with them on a weekly basis, they are perfectly okay with that.

They're not like you just met with me last week do you really have question

again? They are really okay with like, I have no idea what you are talking

about, can you help?

Mia commented that teachers push her to learn, "She pushed me to learn more.

She could see that I needed more and pushed me." Katie also felt like the professors

at The University had high expectations of her:

They push you further than you think you could go. And I think that is what

helps the most. I had a couple teachers like that in high school. But I have

never had every single teacher that I have had push me like they do in college.

Amy talks about other staff at The University:

Where you go up and get your food and you walk through the line, there's this

one older woman and she's so nice. Does not matter how bad her day is, she's

always super nice, "Have a great day, sweetheart." I just want to go in there

just to say hi to her because she, because she's so nice. There's people like that

in the cafeteria too.

Stacey talks about having positive experiences at The University:

Umm the faculty here is really great. They are very willing to help you.  I have

had nothing but great experiences.  One of my professors offered to let me live

with her for a couple of weeks this summer because I didn't have an apartment

to move into right away and I couldn't stay at my other apartment.  It ended up

working out and I didn't have to but she offered.  Umm most of my professors

give me their cell phone numbers.

Amy mentions that she liked that teachers remembered her.

I would have teachers walk by that I've taken classes with and I love them as

teachers. I'm like, "Oh, hi," and they'll stop and talk to you. They don't care if

they're late to class for five minutes. They'll talk to you and ask how your day

is and how your classes are going, so it's nice.

Ethan says that professors reach out to students outside of class:

I had one professor last year . . . she said that if you ever have any questions,

she would emphasize this every class, reach me at my home phone, my cell

doesn't get service, but feel free to call me on my home phone, answer any

questions, and do that.  I've had lunch with professors, and have had coffee

downtown with my advisor, and going over some things.

**Opportunities for Involvement**. Opportunities for involvement was the third

essential theme that emerged. The participants talked about the many opportunities to

get involved on campus. All of the participants talked about the many things to do on

campus and in the surrounding area.  They stressed the importance of leaving your

dorm room and taking advantage of the numerous things to do. Mia highlights all there

is to do:

> It is amazing. There are so many opportunities to do stuff and so many
>
> opportunities to get involved. Float the river, ski in the mountains, take a hike
>
> up the mountain, or just stay around campus with my friends and make our
>
> own fun.

In addition to being aware of the many opportunities to do things on, off, and

around campus, it is equally important to get involved.  To actually get out there and

do things.  Both Taylor and Kathy spoke about getting involved.

> Taylor stated:
>
> It's definitely important to get involved. It helps you work with teamwork
>
> and communication skills. It can help with budgeting skills if you're in a
>
> club and you're the treasurer.  It gives you responsibility sometimes. You
>
> have projects you do in clubs that you have to work together with or you
>
> have to manage your time with because you have classes on top of the
>
> clubs. It's good for working together and trying to get yourself ready for
>
> working with other people when you get into your field.

Kathy shares:

I've done a lot. Something that was big for me, I was really involved in high

school and I wanted to stay that way in college, when I first started I got really

involved which made it a little stressful, but it was all worth it. I'm part of a

sorority, and I'm an admission rep, I'm part of the year book, I'm part of the

Elementary Ed program, I do a lot on campus. I worked up in the Office, and

I'm part of the TRIO program there, I do a lot.

### Sub Themes

In addition to the three essential themes that emerged from this study, there

were a number of sub themes that also emerged. These sub themes added a deeper

meaning to the essence of the lived experiences of the FG college students.  The sub

themes from this study were freshman year struggles, persistence, little to no family

contact, and a sense of independence.  Table 4.3 lists the sub themes from this

research and the number of students who exhibited the phenomena.

Table 4.3

Sub themes

| Theme: | Number of Students: |
|---|---|
| Freshman year struggles | 10/13 |
| Persistence | 13/13 |
| Little to no family contact | 13/13 |

| Sense of independence | 13/13 |
|---|---|

There were thirteen students in this study and most of them struggled their freshman year.  Over half of them considered not returning to The University. For those students, getting involved their second semester and for some their second year of college helped them to stay in college.  Also, those students who considered leaving did not have a support system that first year. The following students almost left: Sarah, Mia, Katie, Michelle, Stacey, and Andre.

**Freshman struggles**

Mia had the following to say about her freshmen year struggles:

My freshman year was hard, I thought I could coast through and not try to make friends and not get involved, that things would just fall into place.  I was in a committed relationship with someone who was younger, and still home.  I was going home on weekends to work. It was just hard. After my freshman year I had a talk with my mom about whether or not I should go back.  I didn't know if I should.

Stacey had a similar story:

Well my freshman year, my first semester was a little rough.  I didn't really focus on academics as much as I would have like looking back. Umm I had a boyfriend first semester, which was a dumb idea.  Ahh, I didn't really make a lot of friends because I mostly spent time with him. So I was really thinking

about transferring after we broke up.  I just didn't have anyone as a support

system around here.

Both André and Sara considered not returning to The University due to family

issues.

André had the following to say:

Well I did have to overcome a lot of [obstacles] to come back for my

sophomore year.  The end of my freshman year, umm I want to say the

summer of freshman year. Uhh my house burned down.  I lost pretty much

almost everything minus cars and like my laptop and my wallet and my clothes

I had on. Umm, yah, I came back and I said hey this is a bigger reason for me

to come back.  You know overcome the obstacles, just persevere as a person,

you know for my family be like this is like this is not an excuse fro me not to

go pursue my education. This is not an excuse for me not to want to be

successful and make myself.

Sara went through the divorce of her parents and as a result considered

not going back to The University.  Her comment was as follows:

My freshman year was really hard because my parents had just divorced at the

beginning of that summer. There was a lot going on emotionally just dealing

with everything that was going on there. I was in a relationship.  I had been in

a relationship for three years and I ended that.  My freshman year was like a

roller coaster of all kinds of things going on and I think I was just so like

emotionally exhausted from that I didn't really think about not coming back.

So I was like just going with the movement and so at that point I had so much

other stuff going on I didn't think about not going back until after my

sophomore year when things had settled down. And then I was like, I think I

hit that wall.  At the end of my sophomore year, like I seriously debated I

might just not even go back in the fall.

Ava, Angel, Amy and Ethan also spoke of struggling their freshman year and

not getting involved.


Ava:

My first semester, I didn't really have a lot of friends up here. When second

semester came around, I started branching out, and I met some girls and then I

joined the sorority. They've been pretty much my life since I've come here. It's

like my home away from home.

For Amy it was the classes that made her freshman year hard:

My freshman experience, I struggled because you didn't get to pick classes.

They signed you up for classes and I took an overload that I couldn't handle, so

I struggled. After that, so going into my sophomore year, I ended up loving all

the classes that I chose. Some of the professors were definitely harder than

others, but the experience that I've had since my freshman year has definitely

been better now that I can pick my own classes. Definitely was hard having

them pick them.

For Ethan it was getting involved that was hard:

My freshman year was kind of slow; I didn't get involved in a whole lot. Then,

my sophomore year I decided to step it up, join more clubs and organizations,

and ever since I've just had the time of my life, and [1] don't want to leave.

The following students had support their freshman year: Kay (freshman team

in dorm), Kathy (TRIO) and Taylor (part of dance program).

Kay:

It was really, I don't know, it wasn't hard coming and transitioning at all. The

sports team actually helped because I knew all the girls coming in, I didn't

have a hard time transitioning to college life at all actually. It was really easy

for me. I really liked living in the dorms, the way my coach put it, we were all

together in one hallway that was a really good experience. Yeah.  It was really

nice having our support system, because it wasn't an easy thing. We had 5 AM

practices and stuff; it was really good having a support system.

Kathy:

I've done a lot. Something that was big for me, I was really involved in high

school and I wanted to stay that way in college, when I first started I got really

involved which made it a little stressful, but it was all worth it. I'm part of a

sorority, and I'm an admission rep, I'm part of the year book, I'm part of the

Elementary Ed program, I do a lot on campus. I worked up in the Office, and

I'm part of the TRIO The first week I also was part of the TRIO program as a

mentee.

Taylor:

I got introduced to the Ultimate Frisbee Team my freshman year. I ended up

playing with them. It was a group first. It was just a get-together, "Let's go play

some Ultimate Frisbee, guys," then it turned into a team. Now they do

competitions, which is awesome and great for them. I ended up not staying

with the competition because it was an extra added could be risk to my health,

already being a dancer and having a ton of risks. We're all still friends. I go

over and hang out sometimes, which is really fun.

**Persistence**

All of the participants had a drive to succeed and persevere. This study defined

persistence as meaning continued enrollment at the same institution for at least three

years. "Persistence means nothing but a longer duration" (Tegtmeier, p.185, 2007).

When Sara's roommate freshman year did not work out, she took it upon herself to

solve the problem.

I just pretty much did it.  I was just like ah I am done with it and I'm gonna

just move over there.  I moved out and I moved into B hall with a friend, a

kind of friend at that point and we stayed together for the remainder of our

freshman year.

André is committed to personal growth and improvement:

My sophomore year I got involved in the pre-med club.  I wanted to be a

doctor.  I wanted to pursue a career in medicine.  I wanted to be a doctor.  And

you know I worked really hard.  And umm I am now the president of the pre-

med club.  I started off as a regular member and now I am the president and

that is pretty cool.  After my three years being in the club.

Ethan works to make The University a better place:

I'm a community advisor in one of the residence halls. . . I've been a CA since

the second semester of my freshman year, I got involved pretty early, and I still

love it, still have the passion for it. Seeing incoming students, and as their first

years, and providing a positive experience to them, and giving them a good

time and helping the retention numbers, is really a passion of mine. It's the

same thing with admissions too, but I'm more passionate about residential life,

and I put more of my heart and soul into it just 'cause instead of attracting

people to the school, I'm helping them stay in the school, and giving them a

fun and positive environment too.

Close to half way into the collecting data, via interviews, the researcher began

to get a sense that there were common themes running through the stories.

*Researcher: I have done five interviews and I feel like they are all saying the*

*same thing.  They have good relations with faculty, friends are very*

*important part of their college life and they all talk about how important it*

*is to get involved and do things.  Oh, they also have a drive to persist.  I can't*

*put my finger on it.  It is something I sense, a feeling I get when I hear them*

*talk.  The drive is not necessarily a drive to be first at something but a drive*

*to get it done a drive to persevere no matter what.  Like this is what I have to*

*do and this is what I am going to do.  I have that drive to persist* (researcher

journal, July 30, 2015).

**Little to no family contact**

After answering the question, tell me about your family.  The following

students did not mention their family again during the interview: Amy, Andre, Angel,

Ava, Ethan, Kathy, Katie, Kay, Sara, Stacey, and Taylor

Michelle talked about her family helping her with her struggles after her

freshman year.  Michelle had a head injury her freshman year and missed a lot of

classes.  As a result, her grades slipped and she lost one of her academic scholarships.

As a result of the academic and financial hardships, Michelle was not sure that she

wanted to go back to The University after her freshman year.

So umm my parents were like is sports something you really want to stick

with, you know you have had all of these injuries. My parents were like are

you sure you want to go back.  I remember sitting at home crying because

my parents were like you should look into other ideas**.** I was like I don't

want to.  Like I want to go back. Like I can't leave.  I remember calling my

coach crying telling them, oh my parents think I should leave.

During Mia's freshman year at The University, she did not get involved in

any clubs or activities at college.  She did not make a lot of friends.  She stayed in

her dorm and kept to herself.  Almost every weekend, she went home to work

and see her boyfriend.  At the end of her freshman year, she thought a lot about

whether or not she wanted to go back to The University.

> After my freshman year, I had a talk with my mom about whether or not I
>
> should go back. She said, 'are you sure you want to go back?  You can do
>
> anything you want.'   I didn't know if I should.  I just decided I would go back
>
> and give it another try.

**Sense of Independence**

The students in in this study talked about supporting themselves.  "I support

myself like one hundred percent," said Sarah.  Mia doubled her sentiments.  She said,

"It is all on me financially."  Other students expressed a sense being independent.

André:

> I've done almost everything involving me academically; I've done by myself.
>
> Excluding financial assistance and you know my parents support.  Choosing
>
> what school I went to go to, choosing what I was studying, choosing what was
>
> my interest.  I had zero, little to no help with that process.

Amy:

It is definitely hard because, like I said, I have my own apartment. I've paid for

everything. I live on my own during the school year and stuff, so it's hard to

not work. There's been a lot of late nights where I come home from work and

you have to finish your paper before 8:00 the next morning. You're pulling all-

nighters.

Students in this study did not receive financial assistance from their parents to

help pay for college.  All of the students worked and were proud that they could

financially contribute to their education.  They also made decisions about daily life

and academics on their own.  They all talked about having a sense of independence.

Researcher:

Not only do these students have a drive to succeed.  They appear to be proud of

their independence.  They talk about paying for school on their own.  This

includes scholarships but not money from their parents.  That is what they

probably mean.  But they seem to be proud that they are away from home and

doing this college thing on their own.

### Summary

As a result of thirteen in-depth interviews with students from The University,

three essential themes emerged.  The themes were sense of community, faculty

support and opportunity.  The participants talked about people at The University being

friendly.  They gravitated toward people who were like them and made many friends.

It was important to all of the participants to make friends and have friends to do things

with.  They all mentioned that either The University was a close-knit community or it felt like home.

Faculty support was the next essential theme.  The participants all had professors that they were able to make a connection with.  They got to know their professors both inside and outside of the classroom.  The majority of the students commented on professors remembering their name and greeting them by name even after they had a class with them.

The third theme that emerged was opportunities for involvement.  Participants talked a lot about all of the opportunities to do things and get involved at The University.  This included everything from sports and clubs to doing things in the area like snowboarding, going to the movies and floating down the river.  In addition to getting out and doing things, students talked about the importance of getting involved.

After the third interview, the essences of the stories started to sound the same with the exception of their personal backgrounds.  All participants talked about the importance of having friends on campus.  Each participant talked about their connection to one or more professors including other faculty members.  Finally, it was clear from their interviews that they felt it was imperative to take advantage of the many opportunities that were available to them and get involved.
Ethan sums up his experience at The University as follows:

> I've just had the time of my life, and I don't want to leave. I've just enjoyed it, and everything about The University.  I find something new to love about it everyday. It's very positive, if I could stay her for 25, 30 years I would.

Angel confirms his sentiments:

> I'm so happy that I went to The University. Yeah I wanted to go there and it
> does have a bad rep and sometimes bad things do happen but overall it's just a
> family. Everyone looks out for each other and everyone is just always going to
> be there for you. If you like it, and you do the best you can, and you make
> friends and do well in school, and have a social life at the same time, then you
> will.

**Chapter 5**

**Introduction**

The persistence and graduation rates of college students are impacted more by their college experiences than by the factors that got them into college (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, 1996). First generation college students make up to close to 50% of the population nationally at college and universities (Engle & O'Brien, 2006; NECS, 2010; Stuber, 2011). However, FG college students do not graduate from college at the same rate as their non-FG peers. There has been little research on the college experiences of first-generation college students (Pike & Kuh, 2005b). Storia and Stebleton (2012b) encouraged researchers to conduct qualitative studies to explore the lived experiences of first generation college students to learn about their experiences in college and to understand the factors, which affect the persistence of FG college students.

In this study, the researcher looked at the Fall 2012 undergraduate cohort at a traditional undergraduate university, henceforth called The University. This cohort had the same first year retention rate (73%) for both FG students and non-FG students (Director of Institutional Research, personal communication, January 20, 2015). Researchers (Engle & Tinto, 2008) indicate that FG students are four times as likely than non- FG students, to leave college after their first year.

The purpose of this study was to examine the essences of the lived experiences of FG college students who did not leave college and to understand their college experiences. This included student engagement and the effect of student engagement on academic success and on persistence. The intent of this study was to tell the stories

of thirteen FG college students.   One over arching question and three sub-questions guided this study.

## Research Question

In an effort to understand the essence of the lived experiences of first-generation college students, the following question was examined: *What are the lived experiences of first generation, college students in the 2012 cohort at a traditional undergraduate university?*

The sub-questions of this study were:

• What are the factors that contributed to student engagement of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

• What are factors that contributed to the academic success of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

• What are the factors that contributed to the persistence of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort?

## Summary of the Research

This hermeneutical phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of thirteen FG college students from The University.  The thirteen students were chosen using purposeful sampling. All 173 FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University were contacted as potential participants for the study.  The thirteen students who responded were interviewed.  These students were first in their family to attend college and who had completed their third year at The University.  These students were interviewed using open-ended questions (Appendix C).  The researcher used follow-up questions for the purpose of clarification and to gain a deeper understanding

of the participant's answers. The thirteen interviews were carried out in the following

manner: eight in person, three via Skype, and two over the phone. Once the

interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed each interview and emailed the

transcriptions to the participants for member checking. Member checking was used to

add validity and credibility to this research (Creswell, 2007). Eleven of the thirteen

students sent back the interviews. All of the participants who sent back the interviews

agreed with the researcher's findings.

After the member checking was completed, the researcher began analyzing the

data by coding and labeling themes. As part of analyzing, the researcher constantly

moved back and forth from the transcribed interviews, to the codes, and back again.

Once the researcher felt there was a comprehensive list of the themes, the data was left

alone for a few days. The researcher then went back to the list of phrases and themes

and looked back and forth again to see if anything else surfaced. Once the researcher

felt the data had been saturated and there was an exhaustive list of categories, the

phrases were combined into three essential themes: sense of community, faculty

support, and opportunities for involvement. Then, the researcher emailed all of the

participants and shared the essential themes with them. The participants were asked

whether or not they agreed with the themes and if they had any comments. Eleven of

the thirteen participants responded within one day of the email being sent. All of

those respondents confirmed the three essential themes.

Once the participants confirmed the themes, the researcher began writing up

the data. The process of writing up the data including visiting and revising the themes,

the transcripts, the researcher's journal, and the written text. The researcher took a

circular approach, as defined as the hermeneutic circle (Moustakas, 1994), to writing

up the data.  The information was looked at, written about, reflected upon, looked at

again and the process began all over again.  As a result of visiting and revisiting the

data, the researcher was able to peel back the layers of data and uncover some

subthemes.  The subthemes were:  freshman year struggles, persistence, little to no

family contact, and a sense of independence.  Using the hermeneutic circle as a

method for evaluating, reflecting upon, and writing about the data enhanced and

deepened the researchers understanding of the lived experiences of the FG college

students.

## Interpretation of Findings

The data was comprehensively analyzed and as a result three essential themes

emerged from this study.  The three themes were sense of community, opportunities

for involvement, and faculty support.  The phrases that were most common fell into

the category of sense of community.

**Sense of Community**. Sense of community is when one has a feeling of

connection, a feeling of belonging with others in their immediate surroundings.

Participants in this study spoke about the importance of having friends, making friends

in college, gravitating toward like-minded people and The University feeling like

home.  The participants spoke of meeting *awesome* people and how everyone at The

University was friendly.  They went so far as to say that The University was like home

and some even said they could not leave The University.

Students do have the need to socially belong and fit in while at college (Petty,

2014).  The students in this study all talked, more than anything else, about how

important it was to make friends in college. They mentioned how important it was to

make friends and have friends to be able to do things with. It is worth noting that for

all of the participants who struggled their freshman year, the one common factor was

their lack of friends. Once they began to make friends and seek out people, their

attitude and outlook on college dramatically improved.

Without academic success, students are less likely to remain enrolled in

college. Students' academic learning and success are both positively affected by their

interactions with their peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Since the students in this

study had completed their third year of college and were still enrolled, a certain level

of academic success can be assumed. Table 5.1 highlights evidence of academic

success through the words of the third year completers. These quotes illustrate the

strategies the participants used to ensure they were academically successful. This also

illustrates the experience of achieving their goals and accomplishing more than they

thought they could.

**Table 5.1**

**Anecdotal Evidence of Academic Success**

| Student | Anecdotal Evidence of Academic Success |
|---------|----------------------------------------|
| Sara | We were all in the student showcase of excellence. It was actually really cool. I literally put a whole semester of countless hours on this project experiment. It was nice to go there and see some of the other things. Like I know I put time and effort into this and I was really proud of it. |
| Mia | She taught us real life skills that we can use like social media. She pushed me to learn more. She could see that I needed more and pushed me. As a CA, I like helping people and giving them advice. |
| Katie | My classmates and the athletic training program, and my teachers they kept pushing me to do my best. I wanted to not to let them down and let myself down. I worked so hard to get where I was. |

| Michelle | I am really glad to see even though my schedule is getting harder and harder that I am really working as hard as I can.  And I am able to make Dean's List. |
| --- | --- |
| Stacey | They are really flexible with my hours.  Umm I make my own schedule every semester on what I want to work and around my classes.  If I am ever behind in a class or feeling stressed out about an assignment, I can take off the time to do it.  Umm like this summer, they gave me a whole week off to write a paper.  Because it is a huge paper and it is a big part of my grade and it is only a four-week class . . . I wanted to graduate early. |
| Andre | I was a teacher's assistant for the chemistry department and I helped around all the time.  I volunteered to teach at the elementary school.  Umm, multiple times. I 've done it twice so far teaching them about environmental    Coming into freshman year, I also failed my first ever class . . . .It was funny.  I later took it again and then became a TA for it. |
| Amy | There's been times when I've had to call out of work and be like, "Look, I have a huge test. I have a huge paper due. I really can't come in." Most of the time they're understanding. I've never had to go in if I've called out. . . There's been a lot of late nights where I come home from work and you have to finish your paper before 8:00 the next morning. You're pulling all-nighters. . . I may get a C here and there, but most of the time I have really good grades. It |
| Ethan | I'm excited to learn. I'm ready to be in school, it's my passion.  I want to go there. Being a student is a full time job. |
| Angel | I have a 3.7 GPA because I work hard not only for myself, but for them (my family) because they do a lot for me. |
| Kay | We have to get an 80 on everything too otherwise you're kicked out of the program,  we've already lost pretty much half the program because they haven't made that mark. |
| Ava | Every time I've been nervous about an assignment or a project or something, I always, always email and ask if they can look at it because I have no problem going to meet with them after hours or before hours or anything like that. I just want to make sure that whatever I'm turning in is the best work I can. |
| Kathy | I was really involved in high school and I wanted to stay that way in college. . . I'm part of a sorority, and I'm an admission rep, I'm part of the year book, I'm part of the Elementary Ed program, I do a lot on campus. I got trained to be a tutor in the Office. |
| Taylor | It's rough having 2 disciplinarians basically mushing as many majors as you want together. It can be taxing sometimes. |

Students need to be committed to their college (Braxton, et al., 2014).  To be committed to something, one is focused and intent. The students in this study were committed to The University.  They talked about loving it there and it feeling like home.  All of the students in this study lived in dorms on campus during their first year.  It is possible that the feeling of home came from living on campus **(**Blimling, 1993**).** Many of them stayed at The University over the summer because they did not want to leave. It is interesting to note that for about half of these students, The University was not their first choice in selecting a college.  In fact for many of them initially they did not want to go to The University.  Researchers (Braxton et al., 2014) postulate that when students do not attend the college of their first choice, they have a lower level of institutional commitment and this has a negative impact on their persistence. For the participants in this study, this was not the case.  Further research may be able to highlight what makes the retention rate of FG students at The University different from other institutions. Since what happens in college has more of an effect on students' persistence than how they got there or what happened before they got there, for these students their persistence was positively impacted by their university experiences.

The academic success of students and their persistence in college is positively affected by their commitment to their college (Roberts & Styron, 2010).   In order for FG students to be assimilated into college, they need to have support of their peers (Swenson, Nordstrom & Hiester, 2008).   Also, when students have a sense of community on campus they have a higher level of social integration (Braxton et al., 2014).  In this study, the students at The University, made friends and these friends

created a sense of home for them at The University.  Their friends became their support system. This coincides with the research that states when FG students go to college they look to their peers for support (Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008). It was the perception of the participants that all of the people they encountered while at The University were nice.  The friends that they made at college took the place of their family.  They looked to them for support and they participated in events and activities with their friends.  The students in this study were socially integrated in the community at The University.

**Opportunities for Involvement.** There is a positive connection between social integration and persistence (Braxton, et al., 2014).  As part of this social integration, students have psychosocial engagement where they put their time and energy into their social life at college (Braxton, et al., 2014). When FG students are engaged, it has a direct impact on their persistence (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Tinto, 1987*).*  The participants in this study had different groups of friends depending on what they were doing.  For example, they had a group of friends in their major, a group of friends in their classes, and a group of friends at work.  Also, as they went through college, some of their groups of friends changed.  They gravitated to like-minded people. Due to the demographics at The University, more than 40% of the students are FG college students, it is quite plausible that the like-minded people included non-FG students. This could be a possible factor for their persistence.  This parallels what the research says:  when interacting with non-FG peers, FG students improve their motivation, intellectual development, degree plans, and personal growth (Pascarella et al., 2004). When the participants did change groups of friends, their new group of friends was

more like them, and interested in things that they were interested in, more serious

about college.

Ethan:

> I've had a different group of friends almost every year it seems like, starting
>
> my freshman year.  I'm still friends with the people I was close with then. The
>
> only thing was I got super involved my sophomore year, and they still didn't. I
>
> tried to shake up my friends group a little bit, and tried to [hang] out with more
>
> people who were involved just like me. Ever since then, the friends that I've
>
> had are even more positive than they were my freshman year, but the
>
> difference is the students that I'm friends with now, peers, they're passionate
>
> about The University, they're involved in a variety of different things on
>
> campus, and   they're just like me. The experience is positive now.

Faculty support includes making connections with students and supporting

them.  All of the students in this study talked about how important it was to get to

know their professors inside and outside of the classroom.  Students' interactions with

faculty both inside and outside of the classroom are critical to retention (Tinto, 2006).

Although most of the participants were hesitant to speak up in class, they did not have

any issues meeting their professors during office hours, having lunch with them,

texting, or emailing them. Some researchers (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice,

2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005) theorize that FG college students are less likely to seek or

approach faculty and less likely to develop relationships with faculty.  For the group of

students in this study, this was not the case.  They understood the importance of

connecting with professors and establishing relationships with them.  The persistence

of these students was positively impacted by their interactions with faculty.

Amy:

> Most memorable. . . It would honestly probably have to be in Professor L's
>
> class. She's very hands-on and she's very easy to talk to. She'll help you with
>
> no matter what. You can go to her and she'll help you figure out your classes,
>
> what you need, and the whole nine yards. She pretty much helps you with
>
> everything, and that was probably my best experience, was meeting her
>
> because she's helped me through a lot of classes and wanting to get ahold of
>
> people and stuff like that.

 The literature supports this causal connection. The success and persistence of students

is positively impacted when they have interactions with faculty  (Bean, 2005; Braxton

et al., 2014; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012;

Terenzini et al., 1994; Tinto, 2006).

The students in this study believed the professors had high expectations for

them and pushed them further than they thought they could go.  The students

specifically talked about working harder in certain classes due to certain professors

they also talked about not wanting to let professors down.  As a result, this impacted

the academic success and the academic self-efficacy of the students, which in turn had

a positive effect on their persistence. Faculty members who helped FG students'

senses of belonging also help increase students' academic engagement and persistence

(Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Most of the students in this study mentioned that all of their

professors remembered their names.  The participants seemed to be impressed that

people remembered their names and would be willing to stop and talk with them. They

liked that others remembered their names.  This speaks to their fit, their sense of

community, and their sense of belonging. When teachers and others know a person's

name it helps the person feel connected and part of a community and this affects their

persistence.

Kathy:

> All my professors know me by my name. That's one of my things I say on my
>
> tours is that, they all know me, they know if I've missed class, they know if I
>
> miss a paper or if it's not up to my standard of writing. Which is, annoying, but
>
> it's also really great because they're really looking out for you and they really
>
> care as to how you're doing.

**Faculty Support**

FG students at The University can get support from faculty when they do not

have it from parents and peers (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Although some research

(Bean, 2005) indicates that compared with any other employee at a college, faculty

have the greatest impact on student persistence, students in this study mentioned not

only the faculty but the friendliness of bus drivers, cafeteria workers and janitors.  The

participants did not talk about having a specific connection with other adults at

college.  However, the participants were struck by how friendly every one was, how

comfortable the faculty and other staff made them feel when they were greeted, smiled

at, and when others wanted to genuinely know how they were.  This added to their

sense of community having a positive impact on their persistence, and helping to

educate the students.

Opportunities for involvement at The University included:

- joining a club,

- cultural events,

- sporting events,

- sororities,

- community service opportunities,

- going to the movies,

- parties, and

- outdoor activities such as hiking, snowboarding, and floating down the
  river.

When FG students interact with other students in social situations their motivation,

intellectual development, and personal growth is enhanced (Pascarella et. al., 2004).

For the students in this study, once they reached out and got involved, they had a

better time at college and their persistence was positively impacted.  It made a

difference between leaving college and staying.

Mia:

I just made so many friends and got involved.  My freshman year was hard I

thought I could coast through and not try to make friends and not get involved, that

things would just fall into place.  I was in a committed relationship with someone

who was younger, and still home.  I was going home on weekends to work. It was

just hard. After my freshman year I had a talk with my mom about whether or not I

should go back.  I didn't know if I should.  I just decided I would go back and give

it another try. I worked hard all summer and saved my money. I had enough when

I went back that I did not need to work every weekend. I broke off my relationship

with my boyfriend. I got a job on campus as a desk attendant, and later as a

community advisor.

Cultural capital is the assimilation of cultural experiences that affect a

student's social status (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Braxton &

Hirschey, 2005). Cultural capital includes things like attending concerts, museums,

sporting events, parties and many of the opportunities as listed above that are available

to all students at XYX University. The higher the student's cultural capital, the more

they are engaged and more committed they are to their college (Braxton, et al., 2014).

The cultural capital of the FG students in this study was high. They talked the most

about the social aspect of college, of doing things with friends, and about how

important it was to get involved. They had a need to fit in. It was difficult for these

FG students to become immersed into college cultures; they had to make a conscious

effort to make it happen.

Angel:

> . . . which I don't really - go out and meet people and hang out all day, but I
>
> don't party. I would just go watch people, people watch, it was so funny. It was
>
> my favorite thing to do, is walk around and just watch people. I met some
>
> friends. It took me a while to make friends because I went from - in high
>
> school I played 3 sports, I had so many friends. I went from not knowing
>
> anybody really – and I don't party, so I didn't meet people, and I didn't meet

people because I didn't go out to party, you know? I was kind of like, "Oh

gosh, what am I going to do?" Then, I ended up meeting some girls in one of

my classes. I'm still really close with them. You know, you meet someone who

introduces you to someone else, who introduces you to somebody else, and

then you just create your own little family, I guess.

The literature supports the fact that students are more socially integrated when

they put more energy into their social interaction (Braxton et al., 2014).

**Sub Themes**

After the researcher collated the data and extracted the essential themes, the

researcher went back and reread and reflected on the data. The researcher was able to

uncover layers of meaning and let sub themes emerge.  The sub themes in this study

were freshman year struggles, persistence, little to no family contact, and a sense of

independence.  Varying degrees of these sub themes were present in each participant's

story.

Most of the students in this study struggled their freshman year.  They all

talked about the possibility of not returning to The University for another year.  The

reason they attributed to their struggles was not making friends and not getting

involved.  This speaks to the importance of engagement and its affect on persistence.

Amy talked about freshman year being hard for her because she could not pick her

own classes.  Once she could pick her own classes, academics became easier.  This

connection that Amy had helped her enjoy her classes more and she was more

engaged. Mia thought she could get away with not making friends.  She was able to

express how wrong she was and what an important part of her remaining at The University was attributed to her making friends.

The students who did not struggle their freshman year and who did not question whether or not they were going back were involved in college right from the beginning. During first few weeks of college, Taylor got connected with a sports team. They became her support network and helped her become integrated into college life. For Kathy, it was being in the TRIO program from the beginning and feeling supported and mentored by them. The TRIO program is a federally funded program targeted to help first generation students academically and with general support. In her second semester, Kathy joined a sorority; she talked about the group bonding. This only reinforced her integration into college. Kay went to The University and played a sport from the first week of school. Her whole team lived on the same floor of her dorm. They became her support system. Being on the team integrated Kay into college life.

All of the students who were interviewed for this project had a drive to succeed and persist (Table 5.1). Not necessarily a drive to be number one. It was a drive that recognized there was something to do and it was going to be accomplished. All of participants were deeply involved with different groups and activities on campus. Some of these students are leaders among their peers and others held more formal leadership roles such as in their residence halls or working for the admissions department giving tours.

All of the participants were asked to talk about their family. After they were posed with a family question, the students continued to discuss their college

experiences.  A few of the participants brought up their family one other time when

talking about trying to decide whether they should return to The University.  The

students talked about their parents questioning them, asking if they really did want to

return to The University for another year. Most of the students did not talk again about

their family.  When the participants went to college, they separated themselves from

their family.  This confirms Tinto's (1998) research that in order to transition to

college, they need to separate from their community.  This is contrary to the research

that says that FG college students are caught between two cultures: home and school

(Jenkins et al., 2013).  So when they are at school, it is all about school.  From the

outside perspective it does look like lack of support from parents.  However, what

appears as FG's parent's lack of support may be the parents wanting to support their

student's independence.

All of the students talked about being independent.  Some highlighted their

financial independence.  The participants talked about working and supporting

themselves financially. Others talked about independence in choosing their classes and

making decisions on their own.

The participants' stories (table 5.1) revealed their desire to persist in college.

Table 5.1

Persistence

| Student | Anecdote |
|---------|----------|
| Amy | My experience? I'll start as a freshman.  My freshman experience, I struggled because you didn't get to pick classes. They signed you up for classes and I took an overload that I couldn't handle, so I struggled. After that, so going into my sophomore year, I ended up loving all the classes that I chose. Some of the professors were |

| | |
|---|---|
| | definitely harder than others, but the experience that I've had since my freshman year has definitely been better now that I can pick my own classes. Definitely was hard having them pick them. |
| André | Well I did have to overcome a lot of adversity to come back for my sophomore year. The end of my freshman year umm I want to say the summer of freshman year. Uhh my house burned down. I lost pretty much almost everything minus cars and like my laptop and my wallet and my clothes I had on. Umm yah I came back and I said hey this is a bigger reason for me to come back. You know overcome the obstacles, just persevere as a person, you know for my family be like this is like this is not an excuse for me not to go pursue my education. This is not an excuse for me not to want to be successful and make myself. |
| Angel | It took me a while to make friends because I went from - in high school I played 3 sports, I had so many friends. I went from not knowing anybody really – and I don't party, so I didn't meet people, and I didn't meet people because I didn't go out to party, you know? I was kind of like, "Oh gosh, what am I going to do?" Then, I ended up meeting some girls in one of my classes. I'm still really close with them. You know, you meet someone who introduces you to someone else, who introduces you to somebody else, and then you just create your own little family, I guess. |
| Ava | It's different I guess. I'm in a sorority so that's something that has really helped me actually get through school. My first semester, I didn't really have a lot of friends up here. When second semester came around, I started branching out, and I met some girls and then I joined the sorority. They've been pretty much my life since I've come here. It's like my home away from home. |
| Ethan | My freshman year was kind of slow, I didn't get involved in a whole lot. Then, my sophomore year I decided to step it up, join more clubs and organizations, and ever since I've just had the time of my life, and I don't want to leave. My experience is very positive here at The University. It's gotten even better now that I'm going to be a senior. |
| Katie | I think it was my teachers, my teachers and the people that I met (that brought me back after freshman year). I didn't meet too many people until my sophomore year. But it was definitely my classmates and the athletic training program, and my teachers. They kept pushing me to do my best. I wanted to not to let them down and let myself down. I worked so hard to get where I was. It was one of those things that I had to come back; I wanted to continue what I started. |
| Kathy | I've done a lot. Something that was big for me, I was really involved in high school and I wanted to stay that way in college, |

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| | when I first started I got really involved which made it a little stressful, but it was all worth it. I'm part of a sorority, and I'm an admission rep, I'm part of the year book, I'm part of the Elementary Ed program, I do a lot on campus. I worked up in the Office, and I'm part of the TRIO program there, I do a lot. The second half of my first year, so the spring. It was one of the best things I've done actually. I was really nervous because, I was like I'm not a sorority girl, it's not me, I always thought it would be cool but I'm not into all of the hazing and stuff like that. One of the things that, because I joined a recognized sorority, they're not allowed to haze and The University is really strict about that. It's really about group bonding, and really about sisterhood. It ended up being a perfect fit for me, I was able to be president last year, in my junior year, which was amazing. I've had so many great experiences, and they're some of my best friends here at school. |
| Kay | It was really, I don't know, it wasn't hard coming and transitioning at all. The (sports team) actually helped because I knew all the girls coming in, I didn't have a hard time transitioning to college life at all actually. It was really easy for me.  Here? I'd say I guess freshman year because that's when everything's so new. Just the (sports) aspect I guess, I really liked living in the dorms, the way my coach put it, we were all together in one hallway, that was a really good experience. It was really nice having our support system, because it wasn't an easy thing. We had 5 AM practices and stuff, it was really good having a support system. |
| Mia | My freshman year was hard I thought I could coast through and not try to make friends and not get involved, that things would just fall into place.  I was in a committed relationship with someone who was younger, and still home.  I was going home on weekends to work. It was just hard. After my freshman year I had a talk with my mom about whether or not I should go back.  I didn't know if I should.  I just decided I would go back and give it another try. I worked hard all summer and saved my money.  I had enough when I went back that I did not need to work every weekend. I broke off my relationship with my boyfriend.  I got a job on campus as a desk Attendant, and later as a Community Advisor.   I just made so many friends and got involved. |
| Michelle | Actually after my freshman year I almost did leave.  So,  my freshman year of sports, I ended up [injured].  And  I lost my academic scholarship cause my GPA went below a 3.0. . . So that is a hard hit to my wallet.  So umm and my parents were like is sports |

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| | something you really want to stick with you know you have had all of these injuries. . . . My parents were like are you sure you want to go back.  I remember sitting at home crying because my parents were like you should look into other ideas. I was like I don't want to.   Like I want to go back. Like I can't leave. |
| Sara | My freshman year was really hard because my parents had just divorced at the beginning of that summer. There was a lot going on emotionally just dealing with everything that was going on there. I was in a relationship. I had been in a relationship for three years and I ended that.  My freshman year was like a rollarcoaster of all kinds of things going on and I think I was just so like emotionally exhausted from that I didn't really think about not coming back so I was like just going with the movement and so at that point I had so much other stuff going on I didn't think about not going back until after my sophomore year when things had settled down and then I was like I think I hit that wall. At the end of my sophomore year, like   I seriously debated I might just not even go back in the fall. Like I'd just rather work.  I might just work. And then like literally like half way through summer I thought seriously about it and I was like I am already half way done and I should just finish now. |
| Stacey | Well my freshman year, my first semester was a little rough.  I didn't really focus on academics as much as I would have like looking back. Umm, I had a boyfriend first semester, which was a dumb idea.  Ahh, I didn't really make a lot of friends because I mostly spent time with him. So I was really thinking about transferring after we broke up.  I just didn't have anyone as a support system around here. So, my second semester I started hanging out with my friends more.  I got more involved in things. Umm even just going to events on campus.  Not necessarily joining any clubs, yet. And then, I was so ecstatic to come back for sophomore year. |
| Taylor | I'm a social butterfly so it's not like I'm just going to sit over in the corner by myself. I'm going to be like,  "Hey, can I sit with you? You look like you're 17 years old and I am. That's cool." I went over and I talked. I got a couple of friends.  I got introduced to the Ultimate Frisbee Team my freshman year. I ended up playing with them. It was a group first. It was just a get-together, "Let's go play some Ultimate Frisbee, guys," then it turned into a team. Now they do competitions, which is awesome and great for them. |

**Limitations**

This study is limited to this population of FG students from the 2012 cohort and to this setting at The University.  It may not be generalized across different populations and across different settings. It is important to look at the culture of an institution and what works for that group of students (Tinto, 1987).

Another limitation is that it can be difficult to capture the true lived experiences through categories and themes. Therefore, thick rich descriptions are warranted (Stake, 2010).   A good phenomenological description validates the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).  The text of this study includes thick descriptions from both the students and the researcher's journal.

This study was carried out over the summer while students were away from college.  The first thirteen students who responded and were able to participate in an interview where chosen. The results of this study could be further limited due to the availability of the students and considering that all of the participants were leaders. Perhaps these are the stories of leaders and not the stories of the typical FG student.

The researcher attempted to conduct focus groups in order to validate the themes. However, not one student came to any of the four scheduled focus groups despite the numerous email notifications and reminders.  This can be considered a limitation to this study.

**Future Research**

It may be worth looking into the role, if any, that the families of successful FG students have on their time at college.  How does this impact their persistence?  What does support look like? The FG students in this study did leave their families and

communities and became assimilated to college.  However, it is unclear how much if any emotional support and encouragement they received from home.

All of the students in this study had formal and informal leadership qualities. They had jobs as directors, tutors, and tour guides.  They organized trips for other students, held positions as presidents of clubs and sororities, and encouraged friends to go out and meet people.  Many of them were leaders on the University campus. How does this impact the persistence of FG college students?  How do student leader rise to leadership position? The research shows that students who display leadership qualities have increased intrapersonal skills such as self-esteem, sense of personal control, goal settings, time management, and social skills (Hindes, Thorne, Schwean, and McKeough, 2008).  The students in this study did seem to have those qualities.

## Discussion

The researcher wanted to gain a deep understanding of the every day experiences of the FG students in the 2012 cohort at The University.  Once the stories of the students were captured, the researcher looked for themes in the parts of the data (the statements) and throughout the whole (the entire transcript).   As part of the analysis, the researcher then went back and forth between the parts and the whole, reading, writing, and reflecting. This analysis was done using the hermeneutic circle and the data was visited and revisited numerous times (Friesen, Henriksson, & Saevi, 2012; Laverty, 2003; Patton, 2002).  The researcher looked at the data through two lenses, that of the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2016).

The researcher looked for disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 2016).  Once the themes were established, the data was reexamined to look for exceptions to the themes (Creswell, 2016).  The researcher did not find exceptions to the themes.

Using the participant lens, the researcher checked the validity of the data from the participants in the study (Creswell, 2016).  The participants were asked to look at the data twice.  The first time was for member checking of the transcript of the entire interview.  Then again, once the themes were identified, the participants were asked to confirm the themes.

The FG students in this study were 21 and 22 years old.  They can be categorized as emerging adults (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).  This is a distinct period in their life where they are exploring their identity, waver in a period of instability, are focused on themselves, are at an age of feeling in between, and are at the age of possibility (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). There are many factors that influence this stage and how turbulent or easy it is for them.  How prepared they are and how much support they have as they go through this period will have an effect on the smoothness of this transition.  It is unclear how prepared the FG students in this study are to go through this.  However, as a result of their stories, their peers, including friends, and the faculty at The University provide support as they transition into adulthood.

## Conclusion: Questions Answered

The first question that guided this study was: What are the factors that contribute to student engagement of first generation college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?  This study found that the number one factor that

contributed to student engagement of first generation college students was making

friends. Their friends became their support system and gave them a sense of family

while they were at The University.  Both the literature and this study validate the need

for students to make connections with their peers, in order to be engaged in college,

which can lead to their academic success.  Colleges and universities may want to take

notice of this and guide, encourage, and create opportunities for students to make

connections with one another.

The second research question was:  What are factors that contributed to the

academic success of first-generation college students in the 2012 cohort at The

University?  The factors that contributed to the academic success of the FG college

students in this study were being engaged, using resources, and having connections

with the faculty. Being engaged included becoming friends with other students who

had similar goals and attitudes about education as they did.  Using resources included

forming study groups, using the Writing Center, getting a tutor, and asking for help.

FG students in this study made connections with faculty both inside and outside of the

classroom.

The literature reports that faculty are an important piece of students' academic

success and this study validated these findings.  However, students at this university

also made connections with other staff such as cafeteria workers, bus drivers, coaches,

and recreational associates.  These other staff were a crucial component to the

persistence of students.  Both faculty and staff helped to educate students at this

traditional university.  Colleges and universities may want to ensure that all faculty

and staff having any contact with first year, first generation, students, know the

importance of connecting with them.  All adults should be encouraged to have positive

interactions, on a daily basis, with all students. Even going out of their way to make

these connections.

The final question that was explored during this study was:  What are the

factors that contribute to the persistence of first generation college students in the 2012

cohort at The University?  The factors that contributed to the persistence of the FG

college students from the 2012 cohort at The University include the following:

- FG students who persist at The University are motivated to persist.

- FG students make friends and participate in activities with friends.

- They develop a support system made up of friends and faculty.

- They make connections with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom.

- Connection with staff on campus contributed to the persistence of FG students.

- FG students who persist at The University are socially engaged.

- FG students believe in their ability to succeed.

- They use their available resources to their benefit.

- In this study FG students were leaders.

This study determined that for the first generation college students in this

university, the number one factor that contributed to student engagement was making

connections.  Students made these connections with friends, faculty, staff, and the

university.  The factors that contributed to academic success for first generation

college students in this study, were being socially engaged, academically engaged, and

having connections with faculty.  The factors that contributed to the persistence of first

generation college student at The University include the following:  motivation,

making friends, developing a support system, making connections to faculty, and

becoming socially engaged. The practical implications of this study include reaching

out to all first year students and helping them make the necessary connections and

providing support where needed, as early as possible.  Also, all members of the

community at The University should be made aware of the role they play in student

persistence.

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Appendix A

# THE UNIVERSITY
## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
## HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPLICATION

**PART A**
1.  **Title of Study:** *What are the lived experiences of FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?*

2. **Investigator's Name:** Karen Deighan

3. **Department:** College of Graduate Studies

4. **Phone:** (603) 539-3551

5. **Plymouth State University E-mail address:** kadeighan@plymouth.edu

6. **If applicant is a student, name of faculty research supervisor:**  Dr. Cheryl Baker
   **Phone:** (603) 535-2737
   **Email address:** cbaker@plymouth.edu

7. **Is this research being funded?** No    **Source of funding:**

8. **Beginning date** 06/15/2015 **and ending date** 12/31/2015 **of the study.**

9. **Level of review requested, if known:**          exempt    X expedited    full

10. **Does the study require human participants?** Yes  **Estimated Number:** 12

11. **Where will participant recruitment occur?**
      Recruitment through electronic mail will occur

12. **Will participants receive compensation for participating in the study?** No

13. **Does research involve special populations specifically children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally/ physically disadvantaged?** No

14. **What kind of risks if any, will participants be exposed to? Provide a detailed statement about risk in the brief summary.**
      There are no known or anticipated physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal risks to the participants.  The activities involved in this study which include answering questions about the experiences of students who are first in their family to go to college, will not expose the participants to a level of harm or discomfort greater

than those ordinarily encountered in everyday life.

**15. What efforts will be made to minimize the risks?** N/A

**16. Will participants be exposed to deception?** No
**If yes, how will the participants be debriefed?**

**17. Is this an anonymous survey (i.e.; responses can not be linked to the identity of the participants in any manner)?** Yes. All transcripts will be coded so that the names will be changed.

**18. For those applications that involve research being conducted by one or more students, has the protocol described in the application been approved by a supervising faculty member, a proposal defense or a dissertation/thesis defense process?** Yes
**Approval Date:** 5/20/15

**19. Investigator's Assurances:**

> I certify that the information contained herein is complete and accurate.  I agree to conform to the procedures as described and to conduct the research with the highest respect and regard for the participants' right to be protected from undue risk or invasion of privacy.  If changes to the procedure become necessary, I agree to seek prior approval from the IRB.

> In the case that a student is the principal investigator, if changes to the procedure become necessary, I agree to seek prior approval from the IRB as well as to inform my research supervisor and the Director of my program. Finally, I agree to keep my research supervisor informed of my progress and of any complications that may arise.

> Name: Karen Deighan

> Signature: _____ Date: _____

**20. Assurances of Faculty Research Supervisor:**

> I certify that the information contained herein accurately represents the student's complete and final research study and that it has been reviewed and approved by all responsible for the supervision of the work.  I agree to periodically review the student's progress and make sure that the procedures are being carried out as approved.

> Name: Dr. Cheryl Baker.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

# **CHECKLIST FOR THE IRB REVIEW OF THE APPLICATION**

**Note: This checklist serves as a face sheet for review of the IRB application.** If any item below is not applicable, please mark the item N/A and provide a brief rationale describing why the item does not apply or should not be required in the consent form.

## **PURPOSE**

1. X  A brief statement of the purpose of the study.

2. X A brief statement of background and significance.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

3. X A statement describing the participants which includes anticipated age and other demographic information, and inclusion/exclusion criteria.

4. X A description of the specific methods to be used for participant recruitment.

5. X A statement whether minors (under age 18) will be involved as participants.

6. X A statement that indicates investigator will obtain assent to participate from minor.

## **MATERIALS**

7. XA description of the measurement procedures to be used.

8. X All instruments used to collect data from the participants are appended to the application including demographic forms.

## **PROCEDURES**

9. X A description of the data collection methodology/procedure.

10. X A statement of the risks to the participants and/or society.

11. X A statement describing how risk will be managed or minimized.

12. XA statement identifying liability and how the injury compensation process will be managed.

13. X A statement describing any potential benefits to the participants and/or society.

14. X A statement describing the specific methods to assure confidentiality.

14. X A statement whether compensation will be provided to participants for participation.

16. X A discussion of alternative therapies or procedure, if applicable.

17. X If drugs are used in research an addendum for "research involving drug administration" must be included.

**OTHER**

15. X References (include only those references that are cited within the body of the IRB application).

16a. X A consent form with addenda as necessary.

16b. X An assent form with addenda as necessary

17.X Appendices related to support for the project (approval for use of Institute equipment, approval by appropriate person at site for collaboration with letter of support).

18.X Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement has been completed and included with the application.

19.X Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor signatures on the application.

20. X Attached certificate of completion for NIH or CITI Human Subjects Training

# BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROTOCOL TEMPLATE

## PART B

Please use the following template to summarize your study as part of the application process.  Please complete all of the sections.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the essence of the lived experiences of the 2012 undergraduate cohort of first generation college students at The University in order to understand their persistence including student engagement and the students' academic success.

## BRIEF BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Students who are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college and get a bachelor's degree or higher are defined as first-generation college students (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008).  Whereas students who have one or more parents who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher are non –first generation college students. From this point forward, first-generation college students will be known as FG college students and non-first generation college students will be known as non-FG college students.

A student who persists in college is one who enrolls and continues to remain enrolled until he or she obtains a degree (Habley, Bloom , & Robbins, 2012).  Across all types of institutions, FG students persist at lower rates than their non-FG peers (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunex, 2001).  The experiences that students have in college affect their persistence (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley III, Hirshy, Jones, & McLendon, 2014). The transition to college is more challenging for FG students than for non-FG students (Clark, 2005).  FG students go

to college and experience academic, social, and cultural challenges. They are less academically prepared for college and as a result they are less likely to be academically and socially engaged in college (Chen, 2005).  This disengagement leads to lower persistence rates (Chen, 2005).

FG students benefit more than non-FG students from college experiences, specifically their academic experiences (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak,  & Terenzini, 2004).  Positive academic performance and persistence define success in college (Habley et al., 2012).  However, it is believed that the ultimate success can be characterized by graduating from college (Habley et al., 2012). When FG students have positive academic experiences in college, there is a positive effect on their persistence (Pascarella et al., 2004).

When taking factors such as parents'
- income,
- education,
- involvement, and
- expectations,

the academic preparation of the student, and the influences of peers into account, the educational level of the parent has the greatest impact on the success and persistence of FG students in college (Horne & Núñez, 2000).  FG students are often from lower SES backgrounds (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Davis, 2010).  FG students from low SES families are not as likely to be engaged in academic and social experiences (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These students do not graduate at the same rate as their higher SES peers (Braxton et al., 2014**;** Chen & St. John, 2011; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009).  Braxton et. al (2014) theorize that students from lower SES have lower levels of engagement and lower levels of institutional commitment and this negatively impacts their persistence (Braxton et. al., 2014; Chen & St. John, 2011).

Kuh (2001) defines engagement as the energy and time that students invest in activities.  Due to family and work demands, FG students are more likely to be disengaged academically and this has a direct impact on their academic success and persistence (Kuh, 2008).  Additionally, FG students are less likely to be socially engaged  (Billson & Terry, 1982; Engle & Tinto, 2008).   Being socially engaged is as equally important as academic engagement for persistence (Tinto, 1987).  When FG students interact with their non-FG peers, FG students improve their motivation, intellectual development, degree plans, and personal growth (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Interactions between the faculty and the student both inside and outside the classroom are critical to retention (Tinto, 2006).  When students have interactions with faculty it has a positive impact on their persistence in college (Braxton et al., 2014; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012: Tinto, 2006).  However FG students are less likely to develop relationships with faculty members and less likely to perceive faculty as being interested in them (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).  Additionally, FG students are less likely than non- FG students to seek or approach their faculty and ask for help (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007).  Despite

these facts, FG student's interactions with faculty are important to their success (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994).   Faculty can provide support to FG students when they lack support from their parents and peers (Blackwell and Pinder, 2014).

What happens once students get to college affects their persistence and graduation rates more than the factors that got them to college (Terenzini, 1996; Pike & Kuh, 2005b). However, there has been little research on the college experiences of first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005b).  Research is warranted to lead to the discovery of the lived experiences of FG students and the relationship between their academic engagement and persistence.

**Research Question:** *What are the lived experiences of FG college students in the*

*2012 cohort at The University?*

**Sub questions**:

The sub-questions for the study are:

1. What are the factors that contribute to student engagement of the 2012 cohort

   FG college students at The University?

2. What are factors that contribute to the academic success of the 2012 cohort FG

   college students at The University?

**PARTICIPANTS**
- Dr. H. will be contacted (Appendix A) for an email list of third year completers who started their studies in 2012 at The University.
- The students will be contacted initially via email (Appendix B) and asked to respond to the email if they wish to participate.
- From the responses, a random group of 12 students will be selected for interviews (see Appendix C for interview questions). All students will be over the age of 18.
- The students will then be contacted to arrange a convenient time for the interview.

**Participant Inclusion Criteria.**
- Students who have completed their third year at The University.
- Students who are from the 2012 cohort at The University.
- Students who are first in their family to attend an institution of higher education with neither parent having earned a Bachelor's degree or higher.

**Participant Exclusion Criteria.**
- Students who have not completed their third consecutive year at The University.
- Students who are not first in their family to attend college.

**MATERIALS**
- Digital audio recorder
- Compact flash card and a flash drive
- Email to Dr. H (Appendix B)
- Email to 3$^{rd}$ year students (Appendix C)
- Interview questions (Appendix D)
- Consent form (Appendix E)
  Nvivo software
- Laptop

**PROCEDURE**

The whole 3$^{rd}$ year 2012 cohort at The University will be emailed.  The respondents of those emails will be divided into two piles: first generation students and non first generation students.  The names of the first generation students will be entered into an excel document.  The names will be randomized and the first twelve names will be chosen. Participants will be first generation college students in their third year and from the 2012 cohort at The University.  Participants will be emailed the informed consent (Appendix E).

**Interviews**.  Interviews will be set up with 12 participants at a time that it is convenient for each FG student.  The interviews will be conducted either in person or via an electronic method.

**Member Checking**. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the researcher will email the transcribed interviews to the participants.  They will be asked to check the interviews for accuracy and will be invited to add additional information if they wish.

**Focus Group**.  Once the coding is done, a group of the participants will meet in a focus group.  The participants will be asked to verify the themes.

**Data Analyses**

Data analysis is a process of formulating, organizing, and finally analyzing the data (Creswell, 2007). As soon as possible, following the interviews, I will personally transcribe the interview using codes to protect the anonymity of the participants. I will listen to the recording and type the text word for word.  Once the interviews are typed, I will conduct member checking for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).  I will email the transcripts to the participants and ask them to review them.  The participants will be asked to clarify any misconceptions and they will be invited to include any additional information they feel is pertinent.  Once I get the transcribed interviews and any comments back from the participants, I will analyze and write up the data.  The

data will be analyzed using the computer assisted, qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo.  It will help me to classify, sort, and arrange my data in order to fully understand and uncover the essences of the lived experiences of FG college students. I will adopt Creswell's (2007) method for analyzing my data, as follows:

1. I will describe the personal experiences of the FG students in my study.
2. Following the description, I will develop a list of significant statements.
3. The significant statements will be grouped into themes.
4. A description of the experiences with quotes by the FG students will be written.
5. I will then write structural descriptions, which will include how the experiences happened.
6. Finally, I will write the essence of the lived experiences.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**
**Risks.**
        The participants will not be exposed to any emotional or psychological harm, social harm, physical harm, financial harm, legal harm, moral harm, or loss of privacy. The study will consist of interviews and focus groups in which the participants will share their lived experiences with the researcher.  Deception will not be part of this study and anonymity will be preserved in that all names will be changed and no identifying information will be included in any written form.

**Benefits.**
        There has been a lot of research done about what happens before and after college for first generation college students.  There has been little research done on the college experiences of first generation college students.  This research will give insight to students, faculty, and society as a whole as to why these students are persisting despite being at a disadvantage from the start.

**Confidentiality.**
        The names of all of the participants changed to ensure their anonymity.  There will be no identifying information in the final report.  All data including notes and recordings will be kept confidential and in a locked cabinet for seven years.

**Alternative Therapies or Procedures.**  There are no alternative therapies or procedures.

**Compensation.**  There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**
        The results of this study can be significant to the educational community. With more than one third of students in college being first generation and the gap between the persistence of first generation and non first generation remaining the same

for over two decades, the results from this study can inform students, faculty, and administration and can be used to begin to close that gap.

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An investigator has a **Conflict of Interest** in a research study when s/he or any member of his/her immediate family (spouse/spousal equivalent, parents, and children) has interests in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research that might compromise the integrity of the research. Conflicts of interest can be financial, personal, supervisory, academic, or professional.  For further guidance, the University's general Conflict of Interest Policy is set forth on the back of this Statement. The investigator has an ethical responsibility to disclose a potential conflict of interest or a possible appearance of a conflict of interest to the IRB and to potential research subjects as part of the informed consent process. If an investigator or his/her immediate family member is directly involved in potential subjects' health care, professional or academic supervision/evaluation, precautions must be undertaken to avoid the appearance of coercion or conflict of interest in the recruitment process. Please check all applicable boxes.

☒       1. I and no member of my immediate family have any **financial conflict of interest** (a) that is related to or would reasonably appear to be affected by the proposed research; or (b) in external entities whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by such activities.

☐       2. I am disclosing the following **financial conflict(s) of interest**:

         ☐ Salary, consulting fees, or other payments for services
         ☐ Equity or ownership (stock, stock options, partnership interests or other
ownership)
         ☐ Intellectual property rights (patents, trademarks, copyrights, licensing
rights, etc.)
         ☐ Honoraria, royalties for books, publications or lectures, gifts or other
payments
         ☐ Positions in entity related to research (board member, officer, etc.)
         ☐ Other financial interests that could affect or be perceived to affect the
           results of research or educational activities proposed for funding

☒       3. I and no member of my immediate family have a **personal/professional dual role conflict of interest** related to this proposed research.

☐       4. I am disclosing the following **personal/professional dual role conflict(s) of interest:**

         ☐ Supervisory role as faculty/teacher, direct supervisor/manager,
         ☐ Healthcare provider
         ☐ Family/friend relationships

☐ Other

If you have identified any conflict of interest (numbers 2 and/or 4), please provide additional details below. Describe how the investigator plans to manage, reduce, or eliminate the conflict. There is no known conflict of interest.

I certify, as an investigator of this research, that I am in compliance with and will continue to comply with The University's policy and procedures pertaining to financial and/or personal/professional CONFLICT OF INTEREST. I further certify that I will comply with any conditions or restrictions imposed by the University IRB to manage, reduce, or eliminate actual or potential conflicts of interest.

*I attest to the accuracy of these answers and, should circumstances change in the future, I will contact The University IRB to update this disclosure statement.*

_____

_____
Signature                                                              Date

**\*All investigators listed on IRB application must complete and sign a conflict of interest form.**
**PART C**

## CHECKLIST FOR INFORMED CONSENT FORM

All items must be addressed in the consent form. Before submitting the application to the IRB, **COMPLETE AND ATTACH** the following checklist to all copies of the application consent form to indicate that each item listed below has been addressed in the consent form.

 If in your opinion, any item below is not applicable, please do all of the following:  (1) mark the item N/A and (2) provide a brief rationale describing why the item does not apply or should not be required in the consent form.

LANGUAGE OF DOCUMENT

1. Identify the **Flesh-Kincaid** grade level of the language used in the consent form and rationale for identified reading level:
_____

2._X  A foreign language translation must be included if the study will include participant whose first language of
        choice is not English.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

3._X      A statement that the study involves research, an explanation of the purpose and a description of the
        procedures to be followed.

4._X      A statement of expected duration of the participant's participation (e.g., one hour).

BENEFITS AND RISKS

5. X      A description of all reasonably discomforts or foreseeable risks to the participant, as identified in the

         study and any additional, known and unknown.

6. X      A description of any benefits (indirect or direct) to the participant or others that may
         reasonably be expected from the research; if there is no benefits to the participant this should
         be stated.

7. X      A statement of risk to human participants including availability of treatment if physical or
         psychological injury occurs and a statement regarding liability for any injury arising out of
         study participation.

ALTERNATIVES

8. X Disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or treatment, if any, available to the participant
         whether or not the participant elects to participate in the study. If the study is a treatment study,
         what alternatives to participation are available to participants and at what costs (i.e., free or
         not).

CONFIDENTIALITY

9. X      A statement related to confidentiality of records related to identification of the participant.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

10. X      A statement to the effect that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will result in no
penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled; the participant may discontinue
participation at any time without penalty.

COMPENSATION

11.X If compensation (e.g., monetary, course credit, treatment) is involved, describe.

QUESTIONS

12. X      The name of the contact person for information related to questions about the research (the
Principal
         Investigator), the rights of human participants (the IRB Chairperson), and whom to contact in
         the event of a research-related injury (the PI).

13. X A statement that the investigator has answered and will answer all questions posed by the
participant now and in the future to the best of his/her ability.

OTHER

14. X A statement regarding injury compensation and institutional or PI liability for any injuries that
might occur.

15. X A statement indicating voluntary consent has been obtained, including signature lines for
participant and
         investigator, and date.

16. X A statement indicating child assent, if applicable.

17. X    A statement that the participant will receive a copy of the consent form (when an oral summary is  read, and short consent form is used, the statement should read that a complete copy of the consent form will be provided to the participant).

18.  X Addenda if participants include: women who are pregnant, Children under the age of 18, or drug administration.

19. X    A statement that the IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study; this appears after the signatures.

**Appendix B**

**Email to Dr. H.**


Date


Dear Dr. H,


      I am pleased to let you know that I have received IRB approval and am ready to begin the research phase of my doctoral program.  At your convenience, would you kindly provide me with a list so the I may email the entire junior student body?

      I have attached the email that I will send to them.

      If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email or call me.  I can be reached by phone at (603) 539-3551.


Sincerely,


Karen Deighan

**Appendix C**
**Email to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Completers**


Dear (student name),

    Congratulations on completing your 3<sup>rd</sup> year at this university!

    I am writing to let you know about a research study that you have the option to take part in.  I am looking for people who have completed their third year (in college) and whose parents did not go to college.  I am a doctoral student at (this university).  My parents did not go to college either and I want to hear all about your experiences at college.

    If you choose to participate, I will contact you to set up a convenient time for us to talk.  I will collect information via interviews.  We can do the interview either face to face or via Skype.

    If you are interested in learning more about this study, please respond to this email.  You do not have to respond if you are not interested in this study.  If you do not respond, I will not contact you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Karen Deighan

(603) 651-3104

**Appendix D**

**Interview Questions**

The following interview questions will be asked of the participants:

1. Please tell me about how you decided to come to The University.

2. Describe your university experience.

The following clarifying or probing questions ma be needed in order to fully

explore the phenomenon of lived experiences:

1. Why did you decide to stay at The University?

2. Tell me about your family.

3. Please describe your most memorable experiences at The University.

4. Please describe some of your experiences with your peers at The
   University.

5. Please tell me about your interactions with faculty at The University.

6. Please describe your experience in the classroom.

7. Please describe your experience outside of the classroom.

8. Please feel free to share anything that has come to mind as a result of our
   conversation.

**Appendix E**

**CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE**

**INVESTIGATOR(S) NAME:**  Karen Deighan

**STUDY TITLE:** *What are the lived experiences of FG college students in the 2012 cohort at The University?*

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to understand the college experiences of first generation college students.

I am being asked to be a participant in the study because I have completed my third consecutive year at The University and I am a first generation college student.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY**

You will be interviewed and asked to participate in a focus group in order to tell your story about being a first generation college student at The University.
It is expected that this will take one to two hours and two sessions.  There are no known costs associated with this study. Nor are there any anticipated risks.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

**BENEFITS**

There may be no direct benefits of participating in this study; however, the knowledge received may be of value to both educators of first generation college students and first generation college students themselves as they learn the optimal conditions for experiencing success and engagement at college.  There will also be a benefit to the researcher, as her life will be enriched by understanding the lived experiences of first generation college students.

**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES**

 There are no alternative procedures.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

All documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. I understand that data generated by the study may be reviewed by The University's Institutional Review Board, which is the committee responsible for ensuring my welfare and rights as a research participant, to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with university regulations.  If any presentations or publications result from this research, I will not be identified by name.

The information collected during my participation in this study will be kept for seven years in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher.
My confidentiality will be also protected by the researcher changing all names and any identifying information.

**TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION**

I may choose to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. If I choose to drop out of the study, I will contact the investigator and my research records will be destroyed.

**COMPENSATION**

I will not receive payment for being in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There will be no cost to me for participating in this research.

**INJURY COMPENSATION**

Neither The University nor any government or other agency funding this research project will provide special services, free care, or compensation for any injuries resulting from this research. I understand that treatment for such injuries will be at my expense and/or paid through my medical plan.

**QUESTIONS**

All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and if I have further questions about this study, I may contact  Karen Deighan, at   (603) 651-3104 or email at kadeighan@plymouth.edu. If I have any questions about the rights of research participants, I may call the Chairperson of The University's Institutional Review Board.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to me.  I am free to withdraw or

refuse consent, or to discontinue my participation in this study at anytime without penalty or consequence.


Signatures:

_____
Participant's Name (Print)   _____


_____                              _____
Participant's Signature                                       Date

I, the undersigned, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the subject signing this consent form has had the study fully and carefully explained by me and have been given an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the nature, risks, and benefits of participation in this research study.

Karen A. Deighan
Investigator's Name (Print)


_____                              _____
Investigator's Signature                                       Date

The University's IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study until June 14, 2016.

**Appendix F**

**Ethan, 8/19/2015**
**Track 1040**

**Interviewer:** As I said, I have to record this because what I'm going to do is type it up word for word, and then I'm going to send the transcripts to you, and you can look through it and say, yeah that's what I meant to say, or you can say, I didn't mean to say that, or I don't want you to use that please take that out, and I will. Okay?

**Ethan:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any questions?

**Ethan:** I don't have any questions.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Perfect, all right. Why don't we just start with you letting me know how you decided to come to The University?

**Ethan:** I decided to come to The University in a round about way, cause I didn't initially look at it as a university. I didn't even know that it existed, until my cousin came here and she played women's ice hockey for the team, and she's just like, Ethan, I know that you're busy with your college searches and everything, but what you should really do is come check out The University, cause I came up here for hockey and have loved it ever since, and I think that this would be a great place and a great fit for you. Then, I came up here and visited in about, March, it was a little bit above the norm, it was 70 degrees in March, but non the less, it was still sunny, and it was the only college that I had visited that was sunny, and it was just a good omen for that day.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. . .

**Ethan:** Ever since, I've just enjoyed it and I made the right choice.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you came up March of your senior year then?

**Ethan:** Yeah, March in my senior year.

**Interviewer**: Where are you from?

**Ethan:** Massachusetts.

**Interviewer:** The University was the only school that you looked at?

**Ethan:** I looked at 7 others, but none of them really caught my eye, or caught my attention.

**Interviewer:** What was it about it do you think, can you be a little bit more specific?

**Ethan:** What about it was the atmosphere; everybody was so friendly here. Just being in the mountains, I got a sense of awe. Being at home, L City is a very busy city, there's a lot of violence going on, the safety here was another thing. Safety, friendliness, and the resources around, like the river, if you wanted to go swimming in early fall, or if you wanted to go in the summer. There's the mountains, there's hiking, a variety of different recreation uses that you can do.

**Interviewer:** Great. Can you talk to me, and describe your experience here at The University?

**Ethan:** I will. My experience is very positive here at The University. It's gotten even better now that I'm going to be a senior. My freshman year was kind of slow; I didn't get involved in a whole lot. Then, my sophomore year I decided to step it up, join more clubs and organizations, and ever since I've just had the time of my life, and I don't want to leave. I've just enjoyed it, and everything about The University. I find

something new to love about it everyday. It's very positive, if I could stay here for 25, 30 years I would.

**Interviewer:** You could be an educator.

**Ethan:** I could be an educator in this area.

**Interviewer:** Talk to me about something specific, about something you loved.

**Ethan:** Something I love here, that I'm involved in?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, sure

**Ethan:** I'll go with residential life.

**Interviewer:** Okay. . .

**Ethan:** I'm a community advisor in one of the residence halls. I'm going to be in Hall this year, I've been a CA since the second semester of my freshman year, I got involved pretty early, and I still love it, still have the passion for it. Seeing incoming students, and as their first years, and providing a positive experience to them, and giving them a good time and helping the retention numbers, is really a passion of mine. It's the same thing with admissions too, but I'm more passionate about residential life, and I put more of my heart and soul into it just cause instead of attracting people to the school, I'm helping them stay in the school, and giving them a fun and positive environment too.

**Interviewer:** What are some of the things you do as a CA?

**Ethan:** I put on programming, I try to think of different interests either on the floor or the entire building, and try to build the community and engage the community in some event that everybody can have fun in. Let's see. I guess you could say I act as a role model. How I act, is how I want everybody else to act on campus, I stand up for ... for

example, the LGBTQ rights, and stuff, if people are saying something, I'll be proactive

and say, listen, that's not okay to say, you need to cut it out, that's really offensive to

people.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. . .

**Ethan:** Not just that community, but other people too.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. . .

**Ethan:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Can you give me a little more detail about something in that area that

you're the most proud of? Maybe a program that you started or?

**Ethan:** I'd have to say that the program ... what I've been the most proud of is last

year seeing how many people attended my events. Last year we had, I want to say 114

students come to a, it's called Thanksgiving Brinner, which is a breakfast for dinner.

Everybody afterwards was like, can you put more of these on, this is great to have

around Thanksgiving time, right when finals are going to be here. It's a stress free way

to end the semester, and it's just so positive, it was pretty awesome.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. You talked about the first semester, you not being as

involved and then you got involved your second. A lot of times if kids are going to

leave college, they leave after their freshman year. What do you think brought you

back after your freshman year?

**Ethan:** What brought me back was seeing that there's more here, to school than just

sitting in my room, hanging out with friends. I didn't want to leave The University on

a sour note, and I loved The University so much, I had no plans on leaving. I switched

my major after my freshman year, from Athletic Training to Elementary Education,

and I wanted to test it out to see if I would like it here, that's all I can really say. I wanted to try it out, and if I didn't like it I was going to transfer after my sophomore year, ended up getting involved, loving it, and still love it today.

**Interviewer:** What keeps you here now?

**Ethan:** What keeps me here now is the passion, just the same thing that brought me here. The friendliness, the awe of the mountains has kind of gone away since I've lived up here for the summer, and three plus years. Still there's something about it that if you ever go hiking up there, it's still pretty attracting. Now, what I'm saying what's keeping me here is I would say is for me the elementary education stuff, there's a lot of the faculty members in that department have been either principles, in schools in the local area, or mentors, or have taught in some capacity in these schools, if I can have those positive experiences with them, and able to put them on a resume, that can put me ahead of a lot of other students that are coming from other schools.

**Interviewer:** Good, thank you. Tell me about your family.

**Ethan:** Anything specific about my family?

**Interviewer:** No, anything you'd like to share

**Ethan:** All right, I come from a, I guess you'd say a middle class family. My dad's a firefighter, and my mom works in a dermatology office. Growing up my dad has always been friendly with kids, and he's always been a great role model to have around here, and I think a lot of my personality is my dad's personality. I can see that with my passion, elementary ed, and all sorts of things on campus. He's just been a positive role model in my life, and he's been there, and I want to be there for other students. Having that father figure was really helpful.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any siblings?

**Ethan:** I have one sibling. She's a sister, she's going to State in the fall.

**Interviewer:** Nice. Did your mom or dad help you through the process of applying to school or. . . ?

**Ethan:** Applying for school, they wanted to take a step back, they had never done it themselves. They wanted me to develop some independence and go for it. If there was any costs associated with it then they would cover for the costs.

**Interviewer:** How did you know what to do? Where did you get help?

**Ethan:** I got help from guidance counselors at school, some friends. I have a bunch of friends that are in the class above me, so I asked them how to do things, went step by step that way.

**Interviewer**: Please describe your most memorable experience here at The University.

**Ethan:** That's the thing about this, first I can't.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yeah no problem. Or experiences, it sounds like you had a great-

**Ethan:** I have had a great time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. . .

**Ethan:** One thing that really stands out is, I'll go with is seeing the community come together, watching the Super Bowl this year. The Patriots were in the Super Bowl for the first time since 2011, and a lot of Patriot's fans came to the building, and we all sat in the lounge and our former student body president, he put on this program, it was a Patriots Safe Celebration. You're watching the Super Bowl and throughout the first quarter, second quarter, the entire length of the game, he was raffling off various memorabilia, Patriots memorabilia.

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Ethan:** It was just really nice to see so many people come. There was almost 100 students at one point that came out, and watched the Patriots, and got involved. It was really cool that so many people left their dorms in the middle of February, and came to support the Patriots, and came to support him. It just shows the community at The University, if you provide a  positive experience there's going to be people that take your positivity and join you.

**Interviewer**:  Right

**Ethan:**  I can't think of the word.

**Interviewer:**  That is good, I'll take that. Can you talk to me about some of your experiences with your peers at The University?

**Ethan:**  Yeah. Is there anything specific?

**Interviewer:**  No, anything you want to share.

**Ethan:**  I've had a different group of friends almost every year it seems like, starting my freshman year, I'm still friends with the people I was close with then. The only thing was I got super involved my sophomore year, and they still didn't. I tried to shake up my friends group a little bit, and tried to hang out with more people who were involved just like me. Ever since then, the friends that I've had are even more positive than they were my freshman year, but the difference is the students that I'm friends with now, peers, they're passionate about The University, they're involved in a variety of different things on campus, and they're just like me. The experience is positive now, not that it was negative before but.

**Interviewer:**  Thank you. Please tell me about some of your interactions with faculty here at The University.

**Ethan:**  I can tell you that some of the interactions here with the faculty are very positive. I will quote [inaudible 00:13:26] here, former president. She said, a speech that I had give about the Center in February or January last year, she said that it was phenomenal, and that it was just inspiring and a great way to end her tenure, and looking forward to the future. With a lot of the other faculty members it's been positive just like that.

**Interviewer:**  You talked about your faculty in the elementary department, and you wanting to share their experience and learn from them.

**Ethan:**  Yes.

**Interviewer:**  Anything specific stand out?

**Ethan**:  Nothing in particular.

**Interviewer:**  All right. Thank you. Please describe your experience in the classroom

**Ethan:**  All right. My experience at The University as a student?

**Interviewer**:  Yeah.  As a student.

**Ethan**: Mostly positive. There have a been a few classes where you're going to get it, not really that thrilled to be there, the professor isn't fantastic, but I've only had two or three classes that's happened to. All of the other ones that I've had, very positive, I'm excited to learn. I'm ready to be in school, it's my passion; I want to go there. Being a student is a full time job. If you like what you do, you're never going to work a day in your life. I for the most part, enjoy what I'm doing everyday, day in and day out.

**Interviewer**:  What happens when you don't understand something in the classroom? Do you speak up?

**Ethan:**  Ask questions.  Yeah.

**Interviewer:**  Do you seek the faculty outside of the class?

**Ethan:**  Yeah. I reach them on their office hours, a lot of my professors post their cell phone right on their syllabus, there's a call. I had one professor last year whose kind of an adjunct, fill in for a teacher who is on sabbatical, and she said that if you ever need any questions, she would emphasize this every class, reach me ... excuse me. Reach me at my home phone, my cell doesn't get service, but feel free to call me on my home phone, answer any questions, and do that. I've had lunch with professors, and have coffee downtown with my advisor, and going over some things.

**Interviewer:**  How is your relationship with your advisor?

**Ethan**:  It's really positive. An advisor that will go out of their way to, essentially talk with you over coffee as regular people instead of somebody who is on a pedestal or anything like that is something you're not going to get at a lot of places.

**Interviewer:**  Excellent. Talk to me about your experience outside of the classroom.

**Ethan:**  I'd say my experience outside of the classroom has been phenomenal. There's, being able to wake up and say I want to go to the mountains today, it's right there. I want to go hiking, and they have this mountain 25 minutes away. I want to go swimming. Well, we have the river right here down on Main Street, or right off the Main Street I'd say. T Town if you want to go shopping, or if it's a rainy day, that's only 20 minutes away. Being able to do a variety of different things outside of class, and be able to focus on human being, other than sometimes a student, it's really

important to do so. By having all the stuff available to us, a rural town right in New England it's just ideal and perfect.

**Interviewer:** Thank you. You're here giving tours?

**Ethan:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Talk to me about how that came about.

**Ethan:** Originally, I had come here, I became a substitute in town, for the middle schools, and a few of the elementary schools in the area.

**Interviewer:** A substitute teacher? While you were here?

**Ethan:** Yeah. I figured, I'm not going to get called everyday to substitute, I need something to do, or need a job to get by because I can't work once every two weeks, and expect to pay rent, and pay electric and all that jazz and stuff. I called home and found out that the yogurt shop that I worked at, closed, they weren't getting enough business. I don't want to go home, and waste a month and then find out that I don't have a job at home, and just hang out all summer. I want to be able to get some sort of job. My former roommate, were pretty close, he said, hey Ethan, have you thought about reaching out to admissions and trying to get a job through admissions for the summer? I haven't, I said are there jobs through admissions? He's like, yeah. There are summer tourists, just go see what your schedule is like.

I thought there would be tours here and there, wouldn't be everyday. Boy was I wrong. It's been everyday since June 1st that we have one. Every day. We don't have one on the weekends, but Monday through Friday. It's been about a week and a half straight where we've gotten over 42 people on tours in the morning. It's just unbelievable.

**Interviewer:** What do you like about giving tours?

**Ethan:** What I like about giving the tours is being able to be myself, and be completely honest with parents. If you are honest and the parents and the kids like the school better, cause they can tell when the student is giving a scripted tour and we here at The University, we're not scripted at all. It's all ... every rep says something different, we all talk about different things, some might mention something on campus, but others might now. It's all based on each rep, and having the free range to talk whatever we want, is really unique and it's one of the things I love.

**Interviewer:** I'm sure they appreciate it too, the honesty. How did you balance being a substitute teacher, because I would imagine that's all day when you go in. How did you balance that with your course load?

**Ethan:** I could not do my course load while I was in school. I had to wait until my practicum was over and then eventually wait until finals were over. I didn't have to take classes and-

**Interviewer:** When did you do this, all year?

**Ethan**: I substituted from mid May to the end of June.

**Interviewer:** Did you like it?

**Ethan:** I did like it.

**Interviewer:** What age group were you with?

**Ethan:** I was with sixth grade, and actually I was with sixth grade all four times. I only got called four times, but hey it's better than not getting called at all.

**Interviewer:** Right. What age group do you think you'd like to work with?

**Ethan:** Not really sure. I get to work with kindergarten through third this semester, I'll

see. I was with eighth graders last semester, so we will see what I like at the end.

**Interviewer:** Eighth grade, kindergarten, you know. Great. Feel free to share

anything that has come to mind as a result of our conversation. Is there anything that

you'd like to share?

**Ethan:** I don't have anything further.

**Interviewer:** Would you mind if I asked you a few demographic questions?

**Ethan:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** How old are you Ethan?

**Ethan:** 21

**Interviewer:** 21 and you're out of state. Did you work your freshman year? Do you
remember?

**Ethan:** It's kind of tricky, because I get paid to be a CA.

**Interviewer:** Oh, right.

**Ethan:** But I didn't my first semester, so I don't know.

**Interviewer:** Right, being a CA, you started that your second semester of freshman

year?

**Ethan:** Yeah, second semester of freshman year.

**Interviewer:** Your first semester?

**Ethan:** I didn't have a job, and not on top of the CA I didn't have a job either.

**Interviewer:** Oh you didn't? Okay. This past year, did you work outside of The

University? You were a CA, but did you work any job beside that?

**Ethan:** Only in The University, I worked at the pass office.

**Interviewer:** At the Office. Okay. That's going to be my next question. What's your major official?

**Ethan**: Elementary Education.

**Interviewer:** Elementary education, okay. My next question, what do you know about the Office?

**Ethan:** Anything specific?

**Interviewer:** Well, I know you worked there. You as a student, what do you, maybe before you worked there, what did you know about the pass office?

**Ethan**: Before I worked at the pass office I knew that it was a place to go where if you wanted a tutor you could get help there. I didn't know that it was, I knew that it was a place where if you had a disability you could go, cause almost on every syllabus it said something about if you need extra time, or accommodations please see me so we can set up an appointment with the pass office. Things like that. But, I didn't know about study skills, tutors, or I didn't know that to become a tutor all you needed was to get an A in the class, or a variety of things like that.

**Interviewer:** Prior to working there, did you use the pass office at all?

**Ethan**: I used it a couple of times. Only for homework reasons.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean?

**Ethan:** There's computers in the back, and I would go there and ask if I could use this room to just study real quick, or to do some last minute assignment. They're like yeah, of course, there's computers at the back you can go there and do homework whenever you'd like. I'd go in there a couple of times towards the end of my first semester, cause I knew that you could get help, if I did homework and tried to get help, if I needed it, then it's right in that location.

**Interviewer**: Did you need to ask for help?

**Ethan:** Only on a handful of things, like Anatomy and sciences like that.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you. What about the writing center?

**Ethan**: The writing center is, I love the writing center. I found out the long way while of the writing center. My freshman year, I reached out to the writing center and got help for a Criminal Justice paper I was writing. I didn't think anything of it, my professor won't know, I'm trying to get help and he won't think that I'm improving my writing. Then, sure enough I get an email saying, Ethan used the writing center, I got an email from them, congrats. Why are you saying congrats, I'm just getting help from them? He said, well you reached out to them, you went there on your own, I'm going to give you five points on your paper, so I got a 92 instead of an 87. I'm like wow thank you, I didn't expect it for that, for my professor to give me extra credit for reaching out to the writing center. It's pretty good.

**Interviewer**: Did you use it after that?

**Ethan:** I use it every semester, whenever I have a big paper. I typically handle it

myself when it's a small paper. When it's worth at least 20% I bring it to the writing

center.

**Interviewer**: Yeah. Good. I know you probably talk about those on your tours, it's a

hard question to ask somebody like you, but I appreciate you giving me your

perspective from you as a student, thank you. I think I have everything, like I said I'll

type it up and send it to you. I really appreciate your time.

**Ethan:** No problem.

**Interviewer:** I started out in elementary education, you seem like you're going to be a

perfect fit. You have that passion, and you just have that personality. They'll be lucky

to have you. What are you going to do after you graduate next year? Cause you'll

graduate with a Bachelor's right?

**Ethan:** I'll graduate with a Bachelor's. I'm torn if I want to stay here for a fifth year.

**Interviewer**: Will you need to do that to get certified?

**Ethan:** To get certified all I need to take is the Praxis 2.

**Interviewer:** Okay, is that what you are thinking you will do?

**Ethan:** As soon as I pass the Praxis 2, or if I do a variety of things. I'm torn between

either going to another university, and getting my elementary education degree, or

staying here and getting my special education degree.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Ethan**: They do have a fifth year program here in special ed.

**Interviewer:** Now what do you mean going to another university and getting, cause you're majoring in elementary education.

**Ethan**:  From Bachelors.

**Interviewer:**  Okay.

**Ethan:**  I think that possibly trying a change, seeing if I like another university. I've considered becoming a residence director. I don't know if you're familiar with the RDs?

**Interviewer:**  No

**Ethan:**  I'm a CA, and above me is the RD, or Residence Director. Residence Directors oversee the entire building instead of one floor, they handle conduct cases, and anything that happens against a student. They're the first people to interact with the students. They get benefits, like a free house, hot water and everything. Plus free graduate courses, if I was planning on doing [inaudible 00:28:00] I'd try to take the free graduate courses at another university, cause a lot of times, like at The University, if I was trying to go for an open RD position, a lot of the peers I worked with over the years, I would be their supervisor, that wouldn't fly with the management and residence life here anyways.

**Interviewer:**  You're open, you're not really sure. You might go back to school or?

**Ethan:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Good. Well, it's nice to have all those opportunities huh? Thank you very much.

**Ethan:** You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** Good luck on your senior year.

**Ethan:** Thank you very much.

**Interviewer**: Congratulations, that's so exciting

**Ethan**: I hope I helped.

**Interviewer:** You did, thank you very much.

**Ethan:** It was nice to meet you.

**Interviewer:** You too, have a good day, Ethan.

**Ethan:** You too.

**Interviewer:** Bye, bye.

**Ethan:** Bye.

**Appendix G**

Angel Interview

Track 1042

**Interviewer:** I want to talk to you about this a consent form . . .Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Okay? Does that make sense?

**Angel**: Yes.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any questions?

**Angel:** Can you do the cool name on me, to make me sound cooler?

**Interviewer**: Oh, sure. Do you want to pick it?

**Angel**: Yeah, I'll see as we're going.

**Interviewer**: What's the name?

**Angel:** Umm...

**Interviewer:** Oh, you're going to think about it. Okay, you think of a good one. That's cool. Let's just start with the first question. Please tell me about how you decided to come to The University?

**Angel:** Okay. The University is the sort of place that everyone in my hometown goes to. I'm from a small town called R Town. It's a 40-minute drive. The University is not where I wanted to go realistically. I was like, "No. Everybody goes to The University; I don't want to go." Then, when I didn't get into the school that I was dying to get into, I was like, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do now?" And because The University has rolling admissions, I applied really, really late, and I got accepted and I got a dorm

room picked out within a week. So, I was, "All right. These people really care, and they seem like they want me to go there, so ..." That's how... I didn't even go look at the school before I came. I was like, "I'm running out of options. I've got to go somewhere."

**Interviewer:** Right, right. Had you gotten into any other schools besides The University?

**Angel:** E College was really where I saw myself. I had wanted to go there since I was a freshman in high school.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah?

**Angel:** My guidance counselor in high school had told me a 100% you're getting into E College, so don't even worry about applying to other schools. I did really well in high school, so I was like, "Oh, sweet!" But, then I bombed the SAT. When E College had 5000 applicants for 700 spots, they needed to eliminate [crosstalk 03:16]. [inaudible 03:22] No, don't want to go. Great! Great, I have nowhere to go.

**Interviewer:** Oh, dear.

**Angel:** But then I went to The University.

**Interviewer**: Talk to me about your experience here at The University.

**Angel:** Okay. From start to finish, or ... ?

**Interviewer**: Yeah, whatever you want to share.

**Angel:** All right. I went in to The University with an open mind. My roommate was kind of a psycho. She was insane. I'm the type of person who can get along with a doorknob. I didn't really mind her. I was just like, "Whatever. Let her do her thing."

She ended up having to go to rehab or - she went somewhere and moved out. I was like, "Okay." So, I had my own room, which I don't really - I go out and meet people and hang out all day, but I don't party. I would just go watch people, people watch. It was so funny. It was my favorite thing to do, is walk around and just watch people. I met some friends. It took me a while to make friends because I went from - in high school I played 3 sports, I had so many friends. I went from not knowing anybody really – and I don't party, so I didn't meet people, and I didn't meet people because I didn't go out to party, you know? I was kind of like, "Oh gosh, what am I going to do?" Then, I ended up meeting some girls in one of my classes. I'm still really close with them. You know, you meet someone who introduces you to someone else, who introduces you to somebody else, and then you just create your own little family, I guess. Then, my sophomore year I moved in with them. We got a suite in L Hall. Then, I actually became at CA for the second semester. That was a little different than I'm used to because it was probably babysitting. I felt like I was always cleaning up after somebody else, or having to talk to somebody about what they were doing. You know what I mean? It wasn't really fun. My mom felt bad because it seems like you save so much money being a CA, but if you do the math out, how many hours you're working, or how many knocks on your door you get at 3am, someone's locked out of their room. It's just not really worth it to me. It probably is to some people, but I was like, "No, thank you." By the time [I] realized I didn't want to be a CA anymore, all my friends had already signed leases on their houses. I was planning [inaudible 06:00], why waste, [inaudible 06:04] job. It paid for your room and you get $215 every two weeks. It's like a paycheck. Yeah. A girl I knew my freshman year; I texted her and I

knew she lived in a huge house off campus, and I was like, "Hey, let me live with you next year." She was like, "Okay. Sounds good." I moved in with 7 girls and it was literally the best experience I've ever had in my entire life. At first, I was so scared, like, "What am I doing here? I'm not like these people at all." But, it literally turned out to be the best year of my life. They all graduated and I'm still chilling around with them all the time. We talk every single day. It was the best experience I've ever had.

**Interviewer:**   That was your junior year?

**Angel:** Yeah, that was my junior year.

**Interviewer:**   Yeah.

**Angel:** I was so afraid to move in with them, because I was like, "Who are these people?" You know what I mean? They turned out to be the best thing that's ever happened to me.

**Interviewer:**   What are you going to do about living this year?

**Angel:** This year I'm living with the girl who I lived with my 1st semester of my sophomore year. It's just her and I; we got a 2-person apartment.

**Interviewer:**   Okay, good.

**Angel:** It's going to be a lot different going from living with 7 of the craziest, most fun people, to just me and Holly. Basically, just hanging out and just the two of us. I'm excited because I love Holly. She's like my first friend at The University.

**Interviewer:** The research tells us that if students are going to leave college, they're going to do so after their freshman year. What helped you to come back for your sophomore year? Why did you come back for your sophomore year?

**Angel:** Honestly, I think it was just the friends that I made. When you're in high school, I had the best high school experience. It was awesome. At high school, you hang out with your friends and then I played some sports all 4 years, so I would go and hang out with my team, who were obviously my friends, too. Then, I'd go home to my mom and my brother and just hang out with them. But, in college, your friends are your team. Your friends are your family. They're your study buddies. They're your psychologists. They're your everything. You can't just leave, it's like your kid, you know what I mean? You can't just leave them in the dust. I think definitely the friends I made, and the experiences that I had with them, made it all like worth while, made me excited to come back.

**Interviewer:** Good. So, what keeps you at The University now?

**Angel:** Honestly, my grandma and my mom. I'm the first one to graduate college. Out of all my 8 cousins, out of my mom and all my aunts and uncles, nobody has gotten a bachelor's degree ever. I have 3 older brothers, none of them have. So, I think, just the pride that I'll take being the first one and how much my mom has sacrificed for me and my grandma has sacrificed a lot for me. I think it keeps me hungry to - I have a 3.7 GPA because I work hard not only for myself, but for them because they do a lot for me.

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little bit about your family.

**Angel:** Okay. What do you want to know?

**Interviewer**: Anything you want to share. We talked a little bit about your mom and grandma.

**Angel:** All right. My dad's not really in the picture. He used to be, when I was 3. My parents haven't been together for a really, really long time. I have a stepdad. I don't know where I was going with that. My grandma is my best friend. She's the coolest person. She can outrun me, beat me in arm wrestling. She's the coolest person you'll ever meet in your life. My mom is the greatest mom. It's cliché, I know that sounds really cliché. She really will do anything for me. One time, I lost my wallet at school and it had my ID in it; it had everything in it. She left work early, came and brought me money to buy a new ID. She'd just do it. I live an hour away, my high school is probably 40 minutes away. But, she would just literally do anything for me. Everybody knows that my mom's the coolest mom. She's the "Cool Mom."

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you have any siblings, did you say?

**Angel:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** You said you have 3 -

**Angel:** I have 3 brothers, but 2 are just my half-brothers that I see maybe once every 4 years. I don't even know where they live. I have 1 brother, my full brother Ken, who's a year and a couple months older than me. He got a job, a government job, right out of high school. He bought a house at 21, has a new car, has a dog. I have to ask him for

money for a pack of gum. And he didn't go to college. You know what I mean? We're just at different points, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah. Can you please describe your most memorable experiences at The University?

**Angel:** My most memorable experiences. Okay. I'm an admissions representative, so I give tours. One time I gave a huge tour. I remember just sitting in B Hall. I always have them sit; we'll go to a lecture hall. I'll pop up to the front. I think just seeing the faces, because I keep it real with them. I don't fluff it up. You know what I mean? If they have questions, I just give them the honest answer. You're supposed to sort of beat around the bush, but not really. I just say, "Yeah, this is what is going to happen. It happens twice a week I guess , it's just being, everybody trusts me, and falls in love with The University like I fell in love with The University. Because I went from not wanting to be here at all, to not wanting to leave.

**Interviewer**: Why do you care if they fall in love with The University?

**Angel:** I just think because people have this thought of The University being this not a great school, or such a party school, [but] there's so much more to it. I make it my duty at my job, my goal, is to make them see what others don't. Some people are so quick to judge, and have stereotypes. I'm like, "Yeah, there is partying, but there's so much more. You're probably going to go to a party. You're probably going to get drunk at some point when you're here. But, that's awesome, good for you. You're becoming your own person." But, there's also, go float the river on a Sunday morning. You

know what I mean? A Sunday morning. Go get breakfast sandwiches. There's just so much more that people don't look at when they come here.  Yeah, there's awesome academics but there's so much more.

Interviewer:    How did you get that job in admissions?

**Angel:** My friend, he's the head of it, like one of the admissions fellows. I talked to him, and he talked me into applying for it. I just got it. It's volunteer. I give 1-2 hours a week.

**Interviewer**:  You don't get paid for this?

**Angel:** No.

**Interviewer:**  No. Good.

**Angel:** I think it's a really good thing because when I tell people that, I'm like, "Listen. I'm volunteering to talk to you about how great I think The University is." I'm not getting paid to be here. I get a [inaudible 14:13] every year, but ...

**Interviewer:**  Can you talk to me about some of your experiences with your peers at The University?

**Angel:** Yeah. What we do?

**Interviewer**:   Sure, whatever you want to share.

**Angel:** My very favorite thing to do is walking. Say I'm with my friends, and we just walking, jog or we go anywhere. I'm walking somewhere at like 3 in the morning or 5:00 walking back to the house, and I see a group of people and I'm like, "Oh my gosh this is so scary," and then I realize that's 2 kids in my Math class, you know what I

mean? And there's 8 people totally in my Math class. It makes it just really much more comfortable place. Because it's so small like 4,000 undergrads, 3,000 graduate students,  you just always feel like at home. Wherever I go, I'm going to see one of my friends. I can't walk to the ice rink, I can't walk to here or there without seeing 12 people I know. It's like, "hey, how are you? How is Ellen?" It's makes it a more comfortable environment seeing your friends everywhere.

**Interviewer:**   That's great. Can you talk to me about your interactions with faculty at The University?

**Angel:** Yeah I definitely, there's some faculty where I've just fallen asleep in their classes, and like looking at the clock the whole time. But then there's some faculty, that I only take classes because this specific teacher is teaching it. Like Mrs. K, she is an Anthropology teacher. I didn't even know what Anthropology was, but now it's my minor, because of Mrs. K. I just wanted to keep changing attending classes with her. You have a, she's very cool like, you have the majority of them actually want you to do well. It really shows. It'll be like thing after, or <sup>they'll</sup> give you their cellphone number to like, "Oh if you have any questions, text me or call me any time." I think I didn't like 2 professors that I've had since I've been at The University, and it's been 3 years and I think that's pretty good.

**Interviewer:**   Yeah it's pretty good. Talk to me a little bit more about specifically what she does to be so great.

**Angel:** Miss K?

**Interviewer:**   Yeah.

**Angel:** She's just the type of teacher that doesn't just put slides on a board and read

them off, or just give you papers to do.  She actually wants you to learn about it and

she brings in more of her experiences in field studies or just anthropology in general

like what's she's done, and uses that to help us learn and gives us real-life examples.

She cooks, she wanted to take our anthropology class last year, and took us .. and got

like 3 credits so I didn't end up going. Some people in my class went with her. That's

awesome, she took time out of her own life to help us because that's how much she

wanted us to learn about what we were talking about. I don't even know what we were

talking about.  She would like fly us to Florida to show us. You know what I mean, if

you don't get it, lets go to Florida and figure it out.

**Interviewer**:   Right. Talk to me about some of your experiences in the classroom.

**Angel**: Okay, that's a tough one. I don't know. I feel like most of my teachers for my,

what is it called, like I'm a communications major so all of my core classes teachers

are so awesome. All the kids in my class and I know by name now, so it's just like you

become really close with your peers in your classes and you go the extra mile to help

each other out.

**Interviewer:**   Are you the type of person to speak up in class or are you quiet?

**Angel:** I'm the type of person who's … I sit in the middle, middle, middle because I

don't want to be the geek in the front answering every question that everyone hates.

But I don't want to be the kid in the back and the teacher doesn't know by name.  I'll

speak up maybe like once a class, so the teacher knows who I am but doesn't have an eye on me all the time, I think blend but stand out a little bit at the same time.

**Interviewer:**   Go ahead sorry.

**Angel:** I was just going to say that I feel like every single teacher I've had, even Mrs. K., this goes back to Mrs. K. I have her in a lecture hall and she still knew my name. That's the type of person that she is. I feel like every single teacher I've had, except 1 who I didn't really care for knew my name. It was like, "Okay hey how's it going? How are you?"

**Interviewer**:   When you don't know or you're confused, how do you seek help, or do you seek help?

**Angel:** Usually I just go to the people 38 I surround myself with. This year I lived question 7 girls, so all sorts. I had a girl in there share my major and we ended up taking all the same classes, we did that on purpose. Odds are if I didn't know, they would. Because  I was so close to everybody in my major, you just get used to the same people in all your classes. I had all their phone numbers where I'd be like, "Okay Molly, did you understand what this," you know what I mean whatever it was about.

**Interviewer**:   Yes. Do you ever seek teachers outside of the class?

**Angel:** Like go to their office hours?

Interviewer:    Yeah or you said earlier they give you their cellphone numbers?

**Angel:** Yeah. I feel like I email and text them a lot more than I go to their. I don't

really do live office hours which I should probably, but I do, I'll shoot them an email

or text whenever I have concerns or questions or whatever it is.

**Interviewer:**   How are they about getting back?

**Angel:** I think the majority are pretty good.

**Interviewer:**   Yeah good. Tell me about some things you do outside of the classroom.

You've told me a few but could you elaborate a little bit on that?

**Angel:** I give tours and I've had meetings for that. What else do I do? I was a CA

which I'm not anymore, so that doesn't even count anymore.  If I tell you what I do,

then everyone's going to know who I am.  I work for sports. I just like the girls that I

lived with, the other girl who I moved in with randomly. They're all into sports.

**Interviewer**:   Well no I'll just change it to working with sports or something.

**Angel:** Okay yeah there you go.

**Interviewer**:   Okay go ahead.

**Angel:** You do that and I work at a coffee shop. I don't really do that much.

**Interviewer**:   Well what do you do with friends outside of the class?

**Angel:** We do a lot. We'll go always go to the street market in the morning, probably

way more than we should go. Probably every other day we'll go and get a coffee and a

breakfast sandwich. I have a moped and I ride it on campus all the time. We'll just go

and pick people up.  We go to open ice-skating a lot. All my friends ice-skate. I'm not

very good at ice-skating. We'll just go, skate around. What else do we do? We have

fun. We watch a lot of Netflix. We'll have like a Netflix night and pick a new series to watch and if we like it, we'll keep going and if we don't like it, we'll stop. Oh we go hiking, we hike all the time. We have this book of New England hikes and we'll pick out one and go do it on all of our day offs. I actually hate it, but they all like it so I just do it.

**Interviewer:** You talked earlier about having a high GPA. How do you balance work and friends and the academics?

**Angel**: I get always nervous that I'm not going to have enough time to do something. Whenever I get something with assigned, like, "Oh you have a four page paper that I'm assigning right now to do next week," I'll go to the library and do it right then. I never feel like overwhelmed with work because it's always, like I'll get it done the second I get it assigned. The second I get it assigned and the like I have 3 weeks off because that four paper is what we were going to be doing for the next I don't know how long. I stay way ahead of the game.

**Interviewer:** Yeah and that works for you, that's great. You must have good time management skills.

**Amanda**: Yeah I think that's one thing that college, more high school has taught me because I was a great athlete in high school and I lived far from my high school. So I'd have to figure out when I'm going to get everything done.

**Interviewer:** Yeah great. Please feel free to share anything that has come to mind as a result of our conversation.

**Angel**: I'm so happy that I went to The University. Yeah I wanted to go there and it does have a bad rep and sometimes bad things do happen but overall it's just a family. Everyone looks out for each other and everyone is just always going to be there for you. If you like it, and you do the best you can and you make friends and do well in school and have a social life at the same time, then you will. If I could change one thing, it would be like how we felt awkward at orientation because I didn't really meet anybody at orientation, and I did think about in terms of everybody is uncomfortable. Everybody is in the same exact boat as me, and just talk to somebody because they want to talk to you probably just as bad as you want to talk to them but they're awkward and you're awkward because you're uncomfortable so just go out on a limb.

**Interviewer:** Do you mind if I ask you a few demographic questions?

**Angel:** Sure.

**Interviewer:** How old are you?

**Angel:** 22.

**Interviewer:** You said you're in state?

**Angel:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** You lived on campus your freshman year?

**Angel:** Freshman and sophomore year, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Did you work your freshman year?

**Angel:** I worked for the sport department.

**Interviewer:**   Sorry.

**Angel:** That's okay.

**Interviewer:**   Did you work your freshman year? Can you repeat that sorry?

**Angel:** Yes I worked for the athletic department.

**Interviewer:**   Oh the athletic department. Do you remember about how many hours a week you worked?

**Angel:** Probably like 10, not very many.

**Interviewer:**   Not very many. Do you feel that was a good amount or a bad amount to balance with your academics?

**Angel:** Yeah I think I could have done more probably.

**Interviewer:**   Okay and you said you were a communications major.

**Angel:** Yes.

**Interviewer:**   What do you know about The office at (this university)?

**Angel:** I know a little bit about it. It's like where you can go for extra help, or if you have a disability, not a disability, but you have something you need help with like you can get. You can go there, take your test, or they'll go and you can get a tutor there. The Office and the writing center are right next to each other.

**Interviewer:**   You probably know, because you give tours right?

**Angel:** Yeah.

**Interviewer**: Have you ever used The Office?

**Angel:** What is it, the support services?

**Interviewer:** Yeah have you ever used the Office?

**Angel:** No, I've used the writing center.

**Speaker 1:** That was my next question, so you have used to writing center.

**Angel:** Yeah I use it a lot.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about that, what do you use it for?

**Angel:** I usually just use it to edit my papers. I'm really bad at grammar. I'm not really good with my commas. I try to use it like I have to go in and make sure that I didn't use too many or that they are where they're supposed to be.

**Interviewer:** Yeah good. All right, well thank you very much. I have everything and like I said I'm going to type it up and send it to you. I really, really appreciate, Angel, you responding to email.

**Angel:** Oh, no problem.

**Interviewer**: It was great chatting with you. You enjoy the last few days before school starts.

**Angel:** Oh thank you very much.

**Interviewer**: All right, take care Angel.

**Angel:** All right, you too.

**Interviewer**: All right, bye-bye.