COLLEGE RESILIENCY: HOW SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS INFLUENCE PERSISTENCE IN FULL-TIME, FIRST-GENERATION MINORITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my entire family for their support, love, encouragement and unwillingness to allow me to fail. A special dedication goes to the Matriarch of the Richardson family; my grandmother, Elaine Richardson who has always believed in me and push me to be better every day of my life. I can’t wait until her and my family attend graduation and see me become Dr. Michael Durant, Jr.

Because of your love for me, I have accomplished more than I could dream of...
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The fact that I am a first generation college student out of my immediate family is surely an accomplishment, but not enough. I yearn and aspire to achieve more for myself and for those who will be affected by my existence on earth. Thus, in order for me to have a profound effect on my community, I must utilize my talents and gifts effectively. In addition, the knowledge I gained from attending the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Middle Tennessee State University and Northeastern University have provided me with skills above my talents and gifts that will be an asset to my field.

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“Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of first-year, first-generation minority students who participated in a pre-college summer bridge program before the start of their first semester in college. Specifically, the study explored the experiences of the students and how the social and academic preparation in the program affected their persistence from freshman to sophomore year.

By means of phenomenology, the sample was purposefully selected to include five to eight collegiate students attending a public, urban, historically Black college or university on the east coast. The university has an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. The researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of common themes among the participants experiencing this phenomenon.

The study identified, documented and highlighted the strengths and perceived areas of weakness of the summer bridge program. Within the study, and outlined in the current literature, are detailed strategies and interventions used in summer bridge programs that directly affect first-generation minority student persistence. Resiliency Theory formed the theoretical framework that guided both the literature review and research question.

In order for this phenomenon to be examined, there was a central research question employed: How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education?

Keywords: HBCU, college, persistence, academic, resiliency, first-generation, minority, summer bridge programs, pre-college
# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER I: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION**

- Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 13
- Purpose for the Study ............................................................................................................ 15
- Significance of the Study ..................................................................................................... 15
- Research Question ............................................................................................................... 16
- Summer Bridge Program Outline ........................................................................................ 17
- Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................. 19
- Organization of study ......................................................................................................... 20

**CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

- Resiliency Theory Introduction .......................................................................................... 21
- Historical use of Resiliency Theory ..................................................................................... 22
- Resiliency Theory in Higher Education and Academia ..................................................... 23
- The Ecological Model of Resiliency .................................................................................... 24
- Resiliency Theory Relation to Research Question ............................................................ 26
- Resiliency Theory Relation to Research Methodology ...................................................... 26

**CHAPTER III: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

- First-Generation College Students .................................................................................... 27
- Minority Status of First-Generation College Students ...................................................... 28
- Pre-College Summer Bridge Programs .............................................................................. 29
  - College Services for First Year College Students
    - First Year Experience Courses .................................................................................... 31
    - Minority Students in FYE courses ............................................................................... 32
    - Learning Communities ................................................................................................. 33
  - Student Support Services & Retention ............................................................................ 34
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach ................................................. 43
Research Question that Guide the Study ................................... 44
Study Design: Phenomenology ................................................. 44
Site and Participants ............................................................. 47
Recruitment and Access .......................................................... 49
Data Collection ....................................................................... 50
Interview Questions and Protocol ............................................. 52
Data Storage ........................................................................... 52
Data Analysis Procedures ....................................................... 53
Validity and Credibility .......................................................... 55

CHAPTER V: REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Organization of Chapter .......................................................... 56
Interview Questions ............................................................... 56
Data Analysis and Coding ....................................................... 56
Demographic Participant Data ................................................. 57
Summer Bridge Students Profiles ............................................ 58

Participant 1: Nelly
Biographical Information ....................................................... 58
Textural Description ............................................................. 60
Structural Description ........................................................... 64

Participant 2: Ivan
Biographical Information ....................................................... 66
Textural Description ............................................................. 68
Structural Description ........................................................... 72
Participant 3: Patty
Biographical Information ..............................................73
Textural Description .....................................................75
Structural Description ....................................................77

Participant 4: Bert
Biographical Information ..............................................78
Textural Description .....................................................81
Structural Description ....................................................84

Participant 5: Tyra
Biographical Information ..............................................85
Textural Description .....................................................87
Structural Description ....................................................90

Composite Emergent Themes ...........................................91

Emergent Theme #1: Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist ......................................93

Emergent Theme #2: Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success .........................97

Emergent Theme #3: Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue .................................................................100

Emergent Theme #4: Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure .................................................103

Summary .............................................................................106

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction ........................................................................108

Overview of Chapter ................................................................109

Review of Theoretical Framework ..........................................110
Relating Findings to the Literature and Theoretical Framework

Findings #1: “Support”

Findings #2: “Academic Preparation”

Findings #3: “Community”

Findings #4: “Learning the Code”

Implications for Practice

Implications for Future Research

Limitations of the Study

Summary

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Demographic Survey

APPENDIX II: Participant Consent Form

APPENDIX III: Student Email Letter

APPENDIX IV: Student Rejection Email

APPENDIX V: Northeastern IRB Approval

APPENDIX VI: Outline Summary of the Phenomenological Model

APPENDIX VII: IRB Certificate Form

APPENDIX VIII: Consent to use Interview Questions

APPENDIX IX: Interview Questions

APPENDIX X: Debriefing Form

APPENDIX XI: IRB Condition Before Approval (Host Site)

APPENDIX XII: IRB Approval (Host Site)

APPENDIX XIII: IRB Assurance of PI

APPENDIX XIII: Michael Durant, Jr. Biographical Information
List of Tables

Table 5.1: Participants Demographics.................................................................57

Table 5.2: Participant Responses and Composite Emergent Themes.......................92

Table 5.3: Theme 1: Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.................................................................93

Table 5.4: Theme 2: Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.................................................................97

Table 5.5: Theme 3: Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.................................................................101

Table 5.6: Theme 4: Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.................................................................104
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: An ecological model of factors affecting resiliency………………………………25
Chapter I: Research Introduction

College Resiliency: A phenomenological study on how a summer bridge program helped build resiliency for full-time, first-generation minority college students, helping them to persist from their freshman year to their sophomore year.

Minority students are considered a population of students “at-risk” or “underprepared” in higher education (Hicks, 2005). Not only are minority students considered at-risk or underprepared, they are often first-generation college students. According to Choy (2001), 47% of graduating students in the late 1990s were first-generation college students. First-generation college students are more educationally disadvantaged than their peers who have parents who attended college (Choy, 2001). According to Horn and Nunez (2000), these non-first-generation students have an advantage because they, unlike first-generation students, have at least one parent who has attended college; and in theory can provide a basic understanding of how the system works, while first-generation students are defined as those whose parents’ highest level of education is no more than high school. First-generation students are likely to lack specific types of ‘college knowledge’. They often do not understand the steps necessary to prepare for higher education, which include knowing about how to finance a college education, to complete basic admissions procedures, and to make connections between career goals and educational requirements (Vargas, 2004).

As resources in higher education grew narrower in the 1990s, the controversy over who should provide first-generation students with much-needed development skills also grew. Community colleges claimed that they deliver a disproportionate amount of developmental work and that, as a result, transfer and occupational functions are threatened. Four-year institutions asserted that because developmental education is not collegiate-level education, they should not
be required to provide it (Ignash, 1997). High schools were blamed for not preparing students, but educators cited crippling handicaps of overcrowded classrooms, poorly-funded schools, and a breakdown in support structures for children that mitigate their efforts to prepare students for college (Ignash, 1997).

As a result, the number of students coming to universities and colleges unprepared or at-risk is increasing year by year (Sanoff, 2006). According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, 44% of faculty members at colleges and universities feel that their students are not fully prepared for the rigors of academia (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). This statistic is supported by results from American College Testing Program (ACT) in 2006, which show that 49% of high school graduates did not have the reading skills needed to succeed in college (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Adding to these concerns about the general college population, the unique challenges facing minority and first-generation students complicate student readiness and their ability to persist and finish their programs. Therefore, many colleges and universities seek alternative forms of educational outreach to meet the needs of their students. One type of program used to help first-generation minority college students is pre-college summer bridge programs.

Pre-college summer bridge programs are designed to enable students to get a head start on building academic skills, become acquainted with college resources and expectations, develop the structure and discipline needed in order to meet these expectations, and form an attachment to the institution (Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005). The effectiveness of pre-college summer bridge programs has been the subject of a number of studies (Hicks, 2005; Maggio, White Molstad, & Kher, 2005). This study strives to add to the extant literature by examining the perceptions of students who took part in a summer bridge program.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine and to share the lived experience of students who participated in the summer bridge program, illustrating how being a participant in the summer bridge program had an impact on their success.

These programs occur at a critical time in the students’ lives. Freshman year is a time when many students search for a balance between social and academic demands (Hicks, 2005; Raines, 2012). Pre-college programs seek to build success skills prior to the freshman experience. Robinson, Burns, & Gaw (1996) found that nationally, pre-college summer bridge programs facilitated student learning in three general dimensions: transition processes, academic integration, and personal and social integration. Minority students’ persistence is a top priority for educational leaders. This study details the understanding of pre-college summer bridge programs for minority students and how the experiences of minority students in such programs impacted persistence and achievement.

Significance of the Study

This study took place at a Historically Black University (HBCU) on the East Coast. HBCU’s enroll upwards of 370,000 students and graduate a significant share of all African Americans receiving degrees (Thinkhbcu.org). Comprising only 3 percent of the nation's 3,688 institutions of higher learning, the 105 HBCUs are responsible for producing approximately 23 percent of all African Americans’ attainment in bachelor's degrees, 13 percent of all master's degrees, and 20 percent of all first professional degrees annually (Thinkhbcu.org). Black colleges and universities contribute to the development of black intellectuals, professionals, and creative artists.
While colleges and universities may have a responsibility to provide students with quality education, they are not solely responsible for student success. To do so, they must look at many facets of their incoming class as a whole and as individual students; including placement exams, intrinsic and extrinsic factors and past academic performance. Because there is so much involved in assuring student success, the student experience is a vital component to understanding what does and does not help student’s success. On average, most first-generation students entering college will require some type of academic and social adjustment assistance from the college or university, yet many schools are still without student support services and related programs (Hicks, 2005). Targeting students who need assistance before they enter their first academic year serves as the cornerstone for academic success. Pre-college summer bridge programs have served as one of the leading models for HBCUs in helping first-generation minority students gain an understanding of higher education, and ultimately persist towards degree completion (Hicks, 2005).

Pre-college summer bridge programs are seen as a great tool for aiding in this success; these programs allow students the chance to understand what is expected of them from the college environment. Pre-College Summer Bridge programs prepare students with the necessary developmental skills to achieve as strong academic students by providing students a primary bridge between the social and academic skills required for success in college. Moreover, such programs may give students the tools and support they need to persist and ultimately, succeed (Hicks, 2005; Ackermann, 1991; Raines, 2012).

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question:
How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education?

**Summer Bridge Program Outline**

**Historical aspects of a summer bridge program**

The summer bridge program at the University was developed in 2010. Before the current program, the University had two different summer bridge programs to meet the needs of students. The Division of Academic Affairs was responsible for a summer bridge program, and the Division of Enrollment Management was responsible for another summer bridge program. These two units came together in fall of 2009 to create a program that centered on both the academic and social experiences of incoming first-year students. The initiative was funded by the university budget and Title III funds. The Title III funds are education funds that the University receives from the US Department of Education yearly as a grant for student success.

The summer bridge program was designed to support first-time, full-time, direct from high school college students, helping the students gain the skills needed to be successful in higher education. As a result, the program goals are to help students in terms of both academic preparation and social integration.

Upon admission, students are given information about the program, along with instructions for how to apply and participate. The program was designed to assist students who struggle academically, but also students who demonstrate strong academic potential. The program is free to students. It is an intensive, six-week comprehensive program to help first-time, full-time traditional students improve their academic skills, bridge their transition to college, and increase their placement test scores so that they are prepared to move strategically through the university to graduation. The program affords participants the opportunity to:
• Develop the English, math, reading and study skills required for college work
• Develop the social, intellectual, and emotional strategies for successful integration into the university.
• Raise their Accuplacer Test scores
• Acquire appropriate test-taking strategies

To achieve these goals, the program offers several activities and workshops for its students, including:

• Classes and Tutorials which will take place Monday – Friday. Attendance is mandatory for all classes. Students must report promptly and complete all assignments.
• University Survival/Cultural Awareness/Workshops on various topics are conducted throughout the program. Students must attend all workshops and activities planned for their intellectual stimulation, skill development, enjoyment, and entertainment.
• Recreational/Intellectual Activities occur between the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Please note that the recreational facilities will be available to student groups daily. All students will have an opportunity to be a part of a recreational activity.
• Daily attendance is mandatory for all classes and program activities. Students will not be excused for personal appointments during class time. Students must adhere to all attendance guidelines or be dismissed from the program.
• To benefit from the program, students must complete their homework assignments each night. Instructors and tutors will check homework daily. Residence Hall tutorials will be conducted from 8:10 p.m. to 10:10 p.m. for study hours. Resident Tutors are available to assist you with homework and study from 8:10 p.m. to 10:10 p.m.
• Students must submit a final portfolio at the end of the program containing various completed assignments. This portfolio will demonstrate student’s readiness to do the quality of work required in the University. (Student Handbook, 2012)

Definition of Terms

**Academics:** College or university courses and studies: “Academics are a much more important priority to him than athletics” (Gerald McIntosh). (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Catalyst:** A person or thing that precipitates an event or change: Example: *His imprisonment by the government served as the catalyst that helped transform social unrest into revolution.* (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Development:** Of or relating to or constituting development; "developmental psychology.” (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Environmental factors:** the social and cultural forces that shape the life of a person or a population. (Dictionary of the English Language)

**First-generation student:** First-generation students are defined as those whose parents’ highest level of education is a high school diploma or less (Hicks, 2005).

**Higher Education:** education beyond high school, specifically that provided by colleges and graduate schools, and professional schools. (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Influx:** an inflow (opposed to Outflux): Example: *an influx of tourists.* (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Institution:** an organization, establishment, foundation, society, or the like, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, esp. one of a public, educational, or charitable
character: Example: *This college is the best institution of its kind.* (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Persistence:** a student’s postsecondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation. (for the basis of this study it would be moving from freshman to sophomore year)

**Placement Exams:** an examination, as in school, the art of placing. (Dictionary of the English Language)

**Resiliency:** a process in which a person is able to overcome a situation and adapt to the normal workings of life without interruption, despite the challenges they have faced (Shatte & Reivich, 2002; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1999; Masten & Tellegen, 2012)

**Retention:** usually a percentage measurement showing how many students re-enrolled at an institution that they attended the previous year.

**Organization of study**

The study began with an introduction, followed by the purpose and significance of the study. The research question and an overview of the summer bridge program were highlighted, and the Chapter closed with the definition of related terms. The theoretical framework is discussed in Chapter 2, highlighting how the framework not only guided the study, but the interview questions as well. Chapter 3 is an overview of the literature surrounding the topics of first-generation, summer bridge programs, and academic resources. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used for the study. It includes all the aspects of the study as it relates to the study site, participants, research data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 5 tells the story of the participants and reports the findings of the study. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of those findings and how they relate to the existing literature and framework.
Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

“Nearly all newspapers and nightly news programs give the impression that something is drastically wrong with most children and teens. Their lives appear full of trauma and pain; their behaviors are antisocial and immoral. The shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado became something of a national obsession; for weeks, talk shows focused on the problems and emotional illnesses of America’s youth. If the news is to be believed, youth in the United States are in a profound crisis and have little chance of developing better lives” (Furman, 2000).

Resiliency Theory Introduction

While there are many ways to understand persistence of students in higher education, resiliency theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Resiliency theory provides a framework for understanding the development of an individual, and it aligns the risk factors related to success of the individual (Masten, 2001). The term resiliency is used to describe a process in which a person is able to overcome a situation and adapt to the normal working of life without interruption, despite the challenges they have faced (Masten, 2001; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Shatte & Reivich, 2002; Rutter, 1999). Masten (2001) referred to the resilience process as “ordinary magic,” simply because a majority of individuals who undergo serious adversity “remarkably” manage to achieve normative developmental outcomes. According to Bernard (1995) research in resiliency concludes that each person has an innate capacity for resiliency. Resilience is used to label three different types of phenomena: (a) individuals who have
experienced traumatic events but have had the benefit of being able to recover well, (b) persons who belong to high-risk groups, yet have been able to have better outcomes than what was expected of them, and (c) persons who show positive adaptation despite life stressors (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Michael Rutter (1999) helped solidify what we consider today to be resilience research. His work examined the risk and protective factors across the lifespan (Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). The protective factors are those indicators that have a positive effect, while risk factors are the indicators that have a negative effect on successful adaptation. First-generation minority college students are considered at-risk for persistence and continuation in college from year to year.

Embrace the Future (2005) found that the identification of specific risk factors is only beneficial if the risk can be reduced or the individual can be helped to cope in spite of the risk. Based on this assertion, this study assumes that programs that aim to promote resiliency are more effective if they target at-risk individuals. Thus, individuals who have to deal or cope with adversity have a greater need for resiliency based interventions than those for whom life goes more smoothly or easily. Pre-college Summer Bridge programs are designed to help build the sense of belonging and acceptance, which often times individuals from at-risk environments lack. Bridge programs are designed to promote positive behavior towards education (Hicks, 2005; Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005).

**Historical Use of Resiliency Theory**

Resiliency studies have historically looked at adolescents who were deemed to be at high-risk, including those who were poverty-stricken and those who were in war-torn communities (Benard, 1991; Jozefowicz-Sitiibeni & Allen-Meares, 2002). Between 50% and 70% of youth who are exposed to high-risk conditions eventually develop social stability and
overcome the odds to lead successful lives (Jozefowicz-Sitiiben & Allen-Meares, 2002). For over 40 years, researchers have used resiliency theory as a framework to serve as a guiding point for their research studies (Masten, 2001). Masten (2001) explained that resiliency theory grew from the area of positive psychology, which is the scientific study of human strengths and virtues (Sheldon & King, 2001). Positive psychology researchers study the average people, and they seek to find out what works, what is right and what is improving.

However, much like resiliency theory, positive psychology seeks to explain the phenomenon that, despite all the difficulties, the majority of people manage to live lives of dignity and purpose (Sheldon and King, 2001). Needless to say, because of resiliency theory, positive psychology was able to grow. Yet, despite its similarities to resiliency theory; positive psychology “neglected important phenomena in human adaption and development during periods of focus of risk, problems, pathology, and treatment” (p. 235). Masten (2001) and Masten & Tellegen (2012) added that resiliency theory was developed as a means to overcast the life of the individual person, thus highlighting the value attributes. It is important to know that the use of “resiliency theory helped to rekindle positive psychology theory” (Masten, 2001, p.235). Used primarily in qualitative studies, resiliency theory has been used to study effects of being able to overcome in both children and adults (Rutter, 1990).

**Resiliency Theory in Higher Education and Academia**

Resiliency theory can be used to help understand why some overcome risk factors and others do not. While in education it is clear that the journey toward the top is unique and individual, having the theory of resiliency to serve as the link between “I made it” and “I didn’t make it” is invaluable.
One of the significant contributions to the development of resiliency theory is that of Richardson (2002), whose metatheory of resilience and resiliency channeled the work of Ann Masten and Michael Rutters discussing the important factors that help people become resilient. Richardson (2002) stated that the term resilience has been developed to represent growth or adaptation. He also proposed three possible outcomes to the resiliency process: life progression, life stagnation and life digression (Richardson, 2002). The works of Shatte and Reivich (2002) and Richardson (2002) also suggest that resilience for individuals is to be able to bounce back and move past major life setbacks and reach the highest potential possible. Each of these researchers focused on young adults in their research on resiliency theory.

Resiliency is directly related to success in education. According to Bernard (1991), resiliency is fostered by the characteristics of family, school, and community environments. Yet, like pre-college summer bridge programs that allow for students to feel a sense of connection and growth; resilience in students is constructed when students are placed in environments where there are high expectations (Bernard, 1991). Students are better connected when they are placed in structured environments, particularly where expectations are set by firm guidance, structure, and challenge (Hicks, 2005). Meaningful participation and contribution include opportunities for value responsibility (Bernard, 1991). Thus, pre-college summer bridge programs may foster students’ ability to feel connected to the university early and give them a sense of responsibility and pride in their educational pursuit. Students who participate in meaningful learning experiences connect with their institutions of higher education (Hicks, 2005).

The Ecological Model of Resiliency

The use of the ecological model in resiliency is increasing, especially in the study of young people and their ability to adapt to environmental factors. This ecological construct
suggests that most youth develop resiliency through the interaction with the environment, family, schools, and communities (Jozefowicz-Sitiibeni & Allen-Meares, 2002). According to Embrace the Future (2005) genetic factors play a significant role in resiliency; however, the quality of interpersonal relationships and support from outside supporters are important. Family has the biggest impact on development in resiliency; however, schools also play major roles in positive development in the face of risk present (Brooks, 2006). School administrators, teachers and counselors can cultivate resiliency and implement programs that can promote positivity, according to this model. The ecological approach suggests that isolating individuals and keeping their cognitive functions at bay limits the chance at growth. From this perspective, resiliency is the ultimate responsibility of communities, schools and families.

*Figure 1.1: An ecological model of factors affecting resiliency*
Figure 1 illustrates how the process of resiliency is a function of networks that work together to influence “thoughts and feelings, his or her family, school and the immediate neighborhood, and ultimately the wider world.” (Embrace the Future, 2005).

**Resiliency Theory Relation to Research Question**

When addressing the need for student achievement towards persistence in higher education, one must be able to understand the role universities play in student achievement. Resiliency serves as the foundation of how a student can persevere beyond what’s expected of them if given the proper tools from the beginning. The following research question related to resiliency theory will guide this framework and study:

How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education?

**Resiliency Theory in Relation to Research Methodology**

This study called for a phenomenological research design because it examined the lived experience of participants in a summer bridge program at a university. This study focused on the lived experience of first-generation minority students and the impact the program had on them being able to persist from freshman to sophomore year. The use of resiliency theory was helpful in looking at how the participants were able to advance from freshman to sophomore despite not having anyone in their immediately family attend college.
Chapter III: Review of Literature

This literature review was conducted to help determine historical effects of a pre-college summer bridge program on first-year, first-generation minority college students concerning their persistence from first to second year. This chapter examines the major constructs of the study, placing each in a scholarly framework. It examines the social and academic needs of first-generation minority students and examples from the extant literature regarding effective interventions. It begins with an examination of the literature surrounding first generation students, then the minority status of first generation students. A discussion of summer bridge programs and first year experience courses follows, in addition to a review of the literature surrounding learning communities, student support services and developmental education courses. The chapter ends with an overview of current learning strategies.

First-Generation College Students

Students who are the first in their extended families to attend college and then go on to lead lives of activism are the beneficiaries of a blend of large gestures of support and small acts of kindness (Sandria Rodriguez, 2003).

Many students who enter into higher education are dependent on the institution they attend to help them integrate both academically and socially. As many as 82% of all students enroll in college right after high school, and 34% of all first-year college students identify as first-generation at four-year institutions, and 53 % at two-year community colleges (Choy, 2001). They (and their parents) are neither truly prepared for nor knowledgeable about how to utilize many college systems (Choy, 2001; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007). According to Choy (2001) 93% of students who live in a household where at least one of the parents holds a degree
will enroll in a college or university; yet for families where no parents attended college, only 59% of college age persons will enroll.

First-generation students represent a critical population in institutions of higher education. However, this demographic is considered “at-risk” in terms of academic performance and persistence (Hand & Payne, 2008; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007).

London (1992) wrote that first-generation students “live on the margins” (p.7) and stated that these students are far less likely than other students to adapt to their new surroundings. First-generation college students may be less likely to engage in college life because they know less about the importance of engagement and about how to become engaged (Pike & Kuh, 2005, p. 290). However, they do not have the independence or wherewithal to either ask for or find assistance; instead, they return to their family and a life of dependency. First-generation students are less involved with extracurricular activities and will often shield themselves from meaningful campus events because of their inability to integrate and assimilate with others (Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007).

**Minority Status of First Generation College Students**

“A disconnect between home and school cultures limits the effects of classroom learning as underserved students see few connections to their world” (A Shared Agenda, 2004).

Nationally, first-generation college students tend to be a part of the minority population of students (Choy, 2001; Green, 2006; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007; Hoewedel, 2008). This population is often the hardest population of students to “help migrate and become accustomed to the university/college setting” (Green, 2006, p.22). Additionally, many of these students are considered underserved students or come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore,
many of these students lack the resources and knowledge that their second-generation student counterparts understand.

First-generation students attending colleges or universities are less likely to persist than second-generation college students (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Second-generation students according to Pike & Kuh (2005) outperform the persistence rate of first-generation college students by a gap of 15%; and a disproportionately low number of first-generation college students succeed in college. Furthermore, negative self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth are all directly related to the low persistence rates of first-generation minority students (Francis & Miller, 2008; Ishitani, 2003; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

According to Pike & Kuh (2005) “An institution of higher education cannot change the lineage of its students. But it can implement interventions that increase the odds that first-generation college students get ready, get in, and get through by changing the way that those students view college and by altering what they do after they arrive” (p.292). As a result, many colleges and universities have offered pre-college summer bridge programs that can foster this learning and enhance the skills needed to succeed in the college environment.

**Pre-College Summer Bridge Programs**

“*Current economic pressures suggest that reputational standing alone will likely not be enough to maintain support for summer bridge programs in the future*” (Garcia & Paz, 2005, p. 31).

There are many types of programs schools can choose to implement. One style of program that has been implemented is the pre-college summer bridge program. Pre-college summer bridge programs are designed to advance students on building academic skills, become acquainted with college resources and expectations, develop the structure and discipline needed
in order to meet college expectations, and form an attachment to the institution (Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005).

HBCUs have turned to pre-college summer bridge programs as a retention strategy to help first-generation minority students to persist. One of the main driving forces behind such programs is the need to prepare students who are historically marginalized in colleges and universities (Hicks, 2005). Pre-college summer bridge programs ensure at-risk students have maximum opportunity and that they enter college with knowledge about the college experience and with skills for success (Hicks, 2005; Kezar, 2000). These programs have played a key role in the success of many first-generation college students and helped address many of the academic and social adjustments they tend to encounter during their first year of college (Kezar, 2000). Pre-college summer bridge programs are becoming commonplace and are designed to nurture the academic and social skills of first year college students in a way that will build the confidence needed for returning from year to year (Levitz & Noel, 1989).

Pre-college summer bridge programs are designed to meet students’ academic and social adjustment needs; therefore, they are often times “structured and administered in a variety of ways and target various student populations” (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Raines, 2012, p.30). Tinto (2006) also stated that while many institutions tout the importance of increasing student retention, few have taken student retention seriously; “too few are willing to commit the needed resources and address the deeper structural issues that ultimately shape students persistence” (p.9). Therefore, if institutions are planning to provide students with optimum opportunities for success, they must be willing to implement programs, such as pre-college summer bridge programs, that assist first-generation students in their transition (Hicks, 2005; Kezar, 2000; Levitz & Noel, 1989).
The unique nature of pre-college summer bridge programs includes the fact that they are designed for students who are joining the college community directly from the high school environment. The goal of many bridge programs is to identify what students already know; allowing prior knowledge to serve as a spring board towards learning (Kezar, 2000). The first six weeks between leaving high school and transitioning to college are the most critical, and pre-college summer bridge programs can be vital to students’ success and growth (Woosley, 2003).

Research on the effectiveness of pre-college summer bridge programs is limited. However, when one begins to examine the research surrounding student success and achievement in pre-college summer bridge programs, it is often found that students who have participated in pre-college summer bridge programs are academically and socially better prepared (Ackermann, 1991; Hicks, 2005; Raines, 2012). Research on bridge programs and their impact on student success are far from complete. However, with that said, research that has been completed suggests that summer bridge programs do provide students with opportunities that are necessary for their success in college.

**College Services for First Year College Students**

**First Year Experience Courses**

“Students reported that their commitment and motivation to pursue their studies increased because of the validation they received through the mastery of key skills.”(Engstrom & Tinto, 2008, p.48).

One of the predominant issues in higher education is the increasing number of underprepared college students (Green, 2005). After recognizing the challenges that first-year college students face, many colleges have implemented a variety of educational interventions
aimed at making sure students are integrated into the college environment. Since the mid-
1980’s, the First Year Experience (FYE) course, also referred to as the freshman seminar or
extended orientation course has become a staple at many postsecondary institutions (Jessup-
Anger, 2011). A survey conducted by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience
and Student Transition revealed that over 70 percent of institutions offer these courses, making
them one of the top intervention strategies used for helping with the transition of first-year
students (Keup & Barefoot, 2005). FYE courses serve as introductions to the campus
environment for first year students. In some colleges and universities, orientation activities that
students experience during the summer before college also span the initial transition period of the
first semester and help address students’ needs as they arise (Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Stovall,
2000). FYE courses are generally offered with the overall goal of helping students identify
campus resources and establish relationships with other students and faculty members; and there
is a positive relationship between the participation in a FYE course and academic performance,
persistence, and graduation (Stovall, 2000). Enrollment in a FYE course has “positive impacts
on both short-term and long-term academic performance and persistence” (Stovall, 2000, p.51).

**Minority Students in FYE Courses**

In higher education in general, student success is highly important; however, in most
cases minority students pose the greater challenge for universities in terms of student
preparedness. Minority students’ integration into college is somewhat different from that of non-
minority students (Green, 2005); therefore, being able to fully transition into the workings of
college is often slow approaching. Research has shown that minority students benefit from
participating in a FYE course because it offers the opportunity to have someone who can answer
pressing questions regarding the college transition process (Green, 2005). When students first
enter the realm of college, they must understand the aspects that characterize themselves as individuals. Students’ diverse backgrounds, varying levels of commitment to earning a college degree, and numerous pressures from the external environment all influence their persistence in college (Stovall, 2000). It is also important to realize that regardless of the students’ background characteristics; there are other factors that play major roles in their academic achievement.

Stovall’s (2000) research revealed that about 40% of freshman students enroll in some kind of preparation course and more than half of these students are first-generation college students. With first-year experience courses, students will have the opportunity to become familiar, learn the transition process and become aware of requirements with the help of university professionals.

**Learning Communities**

"One of the most important steps colleges and universities can take in becoming learning organizations, is to reorganize their educational activities, and to encourage shared connected learning experiences (Tinto, 1997)."

“Though it is apparent that the college classroom is, for many if not most students, the only place where involvement may arise, it remains the case that most college classrooms are less than involving” (Tinto, 1997, p. 601). Not having an involved classroom atmosphere which fosters student learning will render students less engaged in the learning process (Tinto, 1997). Learning communities are envisioned as one way in which students actively engage and learn with one another, and where the development of academic and social skills can be achieved (Tinto, 1997; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The purpose of a learning community for first year
students serves as an opportunity for growth; however, learning communities can be used as an extension of a pre-college summer bridge program (Kezar, 2000). Tinto (1997) stated that in their basic form, learning communities are designed to “employ a kind of co-registrational or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together” (p.2). Kezar (2000) and Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) support this notion, noting that bridge programs should continue throughout the students’ first year.

Learning communities can be and are often administered in different forms to meet the overall needs of the institutions (Tinto, 1997; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Large schools often have learning communities of 200-300 students who are broken down into smaller discussion groups, while smaller schools have their students take courses together in blocks of time so that the overall community can meet 3 to 4 times a week. While schools may structure their learning communities differently they are both grounded in the common cores of shared learning and connected learning (Tinto, 1997). Shared learning occurs when multiple students are enrolled in several of the same courses so they can get to know each other quickly and build on their academic experiences together, whereas connected learning courses are organized around a theme or a single large subject for student learning.

**Student Support Services and Retention**

“The views of retention began to change in the 1970’s. As part of a broader change in how we understood the relationship between individuals and society, our view of student retention shifted to take account of the role of the environment, in particular the institution, in student decisions to
Students who are academically unprepared or underprepared for college face greater challenges than students who are prepared. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than 41% of entering college freshman fails to meet the required standards of a college student, yet they are admitted regardless of this handicap. The lack of prepared students creates a greater challenge for faculty and staff members who are trying to help them succeed (Hoyt, 1999; Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005). Extensive research concerning retention in higher education exists; however most of the research was conducted at four-year colleges and universities (Hicks, 2005; Hoyt, 1999). For the last 30 years the study of retention has been a focus for institutions of higher education. Many factors play a significant role in retention in an institution, such as size, academic and social reputation, student engagement and satisfaction, and campus-base retention programs (Ackerman, 1991; Hoyt, 1999; Pascarella & Trerenzini, 1991; and Tinto, 2006).

An example of the importance of student support services is shown in a 1998 study conducted at Utah Valley State College (currently Utah Valley University), an urban college with an enrollment of 18,174 students. Half of the students who were enrolled in the university dropped out or failed to complete their degree, and about half of the entering freshman required some kind of academic assistance (Hoyt, 1999). Hoyt (1999) concluded that student retention rates ranged from 54 to 64% on average, colleges generally lost about 30 to 35% of the students from fall to spring semesters and 60% by the following fall. Although the need for academic assistance has a significant relationship with student retention, many other factors influence student retention, as well. Programs and interventions are needed to increase student retention.
According to Hoyt (1999), “Improving student retention does not have a simple, easy answer, it requires a campus-wide effort” (p. 62).

Recent changes in American higher education have afforded college access to an unprecedented number of minority, disadvantaged, and nontraditional (age 25 and over) students who are often less academically prepared than their peers. Nearly 6 in 10 higher education institutions report an increase in lower socioeconomic status students, and one-third cite student diversity as the greatest challenge for the next decade (Grimes & David, 1999). Projections suggest that diversity will continue to increase. Although colleges have made great progress in eliminating or minimizing many geographical and financial barriers that have historically restricted college access, social and cultural barriers, with associated educational deficits, have been more difficult to address. There are three main areas of concern regarding the under-prepared student: family background, individual attitudes, and pre-college education (Grimes & David, 1999).

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) conducted a 30-year longitudinal study in an effort to understand the preparedness level of college freshman. Freshman students completed the Student Information Form (SIF); which is a freshman survey instrument, during a one-hour fall FYE course (Grimes & David, 1999). Minority students; which according to Green (2005) are traditionally first-generation college students, were reported as the most under-prepared student group. It is suggested that educators can enhance their understanding of minority students and their abilities by designing effective programs which provide: (a) related groups with characteristics almost indistinguishable from under-prepared students, including first-generation and behavioral problem students and (b) basic psychological theories. (Grimes & David, 1999, p.86).
Developmental Education Courses

“Developmental education is one of the most difficult issues confronting community colleges today. Community colleges are charged with teaching students college-level material, yet the majority of their students arrive with academic skills in at least one subject area that are judged to be too weak to allow them to engage successfully in college-level work” (Bailey, 2008 p. 11).

Critics from both within and external to the college setting question whether remedial courses truly prepare students for future college work or even if they are properly part of the college mission (Brothen & Wambach, 2004). Each year thousands of students arrive unprepared for the rigors of college studies, unable to read adequately, unable to write standard academic English, unable to compute algebra problems, and unaware of the amount of time and efforts required to master the skills (Brothen & Wambach, 2004). Developmental education has been scrutinized by students, faculty, and parents for years for the impact of its existence:

As access to higher education has increased, the numbers of students who require remediation and the amount of public resources spent in providing remediation have grown to alarming proportions. An NCES report recently released by the U.S. Department of Education (1996) found that nationwide, all community colleges surveyed offer remedial/developmental education, and approximately four out of every ten first-time freshman are underprepared in at least one of the basic skills areas (McMillan, Parke, & Lanning, 1997, p. 26).
The scope of developmental education has grown to an extent that it is likened to “the education world’s equivalent of the elephant-in-the-living-room syndrome: An enormous problem staring you in the face that everyone can see but no one likes to talk about” (McMillan, Parke, & Lanning, 1997, p. 30).

In effort to meet changing demands of their students, higher education professionals have to look at different teaching techniques in order for students to succeed. Many professors at universities are very specific about how they teach and how they acquired those characteristics that mark their teaching style (Eble, 1983). Teachers mostly model their teaching style after powerful persons from their own student days. Many educators may wonder what a teaching style actually is and how one is developed. Researchers characterize a teaching style by the mark in which they are able to engage student learning (Eble, 1983).

The hope that all students can learn is the driving force behind why educators teach developmental education. Developmental education is the foundation of learning for students; it serves as the backdrop for ones’ entire college career. Developmental education gives students who do not have strong verbal, reading, and math skills a chance to acquire these skills effectively. The effectiveness is mostly placed upon the teacher who is constructing the developmental program design. The current status of basic skills, “remedial courses” in English, reading, and mathematics, has reached a critical juncture in the history of developmental studies programs in higher education across the U.S. (Lesley, 2001). The increase in the need for these courses is due to institutions dealing with high numbers of enrollment, minority students, and first-generation students. A 1995 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) revealed that 78% of higher education institutions offered at least one remedial reading course.
These courses are provided to give students prerequisite skills for entry into college level coursework. Most of the teaching that happens in developmental courses is fundamental; the fundamental aspect is shown in a student’s ability to achieve at a higher level of competency. In all, developmental education has become an integral part of many college and university missions. In response to the ongoing problem in higher education, colleges have developed ways to help prepare the students in a variety of ways including pre-college level reading, writing, and math. Given the importance of developmental education courses, the question as to whether or not such courses should be integrated into regular departments (a process known as mainstreaming), or housed in separate organizational units (referred to as centralization) is at hand (Perin, 2002). These kinds of courses can also be addressed during a student’s participation in a pre-college summer bridge program (Hicks, 2005).

**Current Learning Strategies Used in Bridge Programs**

"First-generation students don’t know what their learning style is, and many don’t have study skills. Many are intelligent, yet unprepared for college because of their backgrounds” (Horwedel, 2008, p.10).

There are several learning strategies used in higher education to help developmental students, two of the most successful strategies will be discussed. The What I Know- What I Want to Know- What I Learned strategy (K-W-L) is a method used to teach students to read actively by engaging previous knowledge, asking questions, and recalling important information in the text to enhance comprehension (Fritz, 2002). In the K-W-L strategy, students are asked to list what they know about the subject and the questions they may have about the subject before reading the text selection. Then after reading the selection, the students are asked to write what
they have learned about the subject. K-W-L strategy prompts the students to identify previous knowledge, consider what they want or need to know, and to list the useful information learned from the selection during reading (Fritz, 2002). Thus, this strategy helps the students to evaluate what they know and have learned. According to Fritz (2002), using K-W-L as an active learning strategy in a traditional lecture classroom setting can facilitate increased and quality interaction among professors, students, and subject matter.

Professors use different types of teaching techniques in their quest to help students become better readers. The Communicative Reading Strategy (CRS) is another tool for professors to use when helping students become more effective readers. This skill-based comprehension approach address similar skills taught to students individually (Martino, Norris, & Hoffman, 2001). Much of the way the CRS is presented is based on the work of Vygotsky (a pioneer in Psychology and child development).

When using the CRS strategy, the instructor uses miscues, pauses, and prior knowledge processing units. He or she can also divide a sentence into clauses to give the reader the opportunity to understand information from a complex sentence. The instructor provides feedback to the reader after a section has been read to create associations to other material or to expand on the information (Martino, Norris, & Hoffman, 2001). After the readers are given assistance from the instructor, they learn how to become better, more independent readers and how to process information at a deeper level.

In addition to specific strategies, technological advancements, such as PowerPoint have also become an effective way to teach students with developmental reading problems. Instructors use PowerPoint to present visual and auditory information to enhance presentations during classroom lectures. By giving a presentation of a textbook chapter, for example, students
learn how to separate topics and important ideas from the supporting information and examples (Yaworski, 2001). To use PowerPoint for the purpose of teaching text structure, the teacher must first assign each student in the classroom a different chapter in the textbook with the understanding that they will present their chapter to the class. Yaworski (2001) suggests that instructors should give ample time for each student to give a clear and understandable presentation. He also suggests that the first class be used to teach the students how to use PowerPoint. The students must be allowed the chance to read the textbook and take some notes, and they must be taught how to transfer the information onto slides for their presentation.

These examples underscore the importance of using approaches in teaching that are designed with first-year students in mind. Faculty at postsecondary institutions must recognize and embrace the importance of working with first-year students. Teachers can use and apply the principles of commitment, command of subject matter, ability to teach diverse students, integration of affective skill development, provision of connected open learning environments, high-performance expectations, and on-going evaluation and professional development to offer their best to students (Smittle, 2003).

**Summary**

Chapter III was designed to present related literature on student transition programs and how such programs aided in supporting first year, first-generation minority college students’ success. As shown in the literature review, the process for helping first-generation college students is a process that requires advance understanding and dedication to student development. Because many first-year, first-generation college students come from backgrounds that hinder their academic performance, institutions should find ways to make sure these students can succeed. Universities must be willing and ready to design programs that can identify and
encourage struggling students to want to persist. As recorded in the literature, when students are enlisted in these programs, courses, or learning environments the content that is being delivered must be considered. While there are many interventions designed and implemented to fill the gap, pre-college summer bridge programs can also be vital to the persistence and matriculation of first-generation first year college students.
Chapter IV: Research Design & Methodology

This phenomenological study applied resiliency theory to understand the lived experiences of first-generation, minority students who participated in a summer bridge program at a Historically Black College/University in Maryland. This chapter presents an overview of the methodological approach, first introducing the approach selected and then presenting how the study was operationalized, including the analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the procedural safeguards, ethical considerations, elements to assure trustworthiness, and the validity and credibility.

Research Design and Approach

This study draws upon a qualitative research design to understand the uniqueness of the phenomena studied (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research helps develop understanding and explain the meaning of social phenomena with little disruption of the natural setting (Merriam, 2001). Creswell (2012) stated that the use of a qualitative approach is appropriate when one is dealing with an educational problem. The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to act as a human instrument of data collection (Sanders, 1997). Also, it is important to emphasize the emergent nature of a qualitative research design (Sanders, 1997).

Because this study explored the experiences of participants in a summer bridge program, a phenomenological approach serves as an appropriate choice when examining the lived experiences of this population of participants. According to Groenewald (2004) and Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is a philosophically-based approach to the study of the lived experiences of people. Ideally, having the ability to examine the lived experience provides greater understanding of the situation or problem. Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Moustakas (1994) argued that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which
little is known. Qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding of the phenomena and fosters new perspectives about things that are already known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This phenomenological study examined the lived experience of five students who participated in the summer bridge program, illustrating how being a participant in the summer bridge program had an impact on their success. This design was used to understand the lived experiences of students attending a public, urban, historically Black university on the east coast with an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. The study examined how first-generation, minority students made sense of and described their experiences in a summer bridge program, how participation in the program helped them become resilient, and how that resilience allowed them to be successful in higher education.

**Research Question**

This study was designed to answer the following research question:

How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education?

**Study Design**

“*Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences... Scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the experience*” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84).

The aim of phenomenology is to transform the persons lived experience into a textual expression (van Mauuen, 1990). Phenomenology focuses on the “wholeness of experiences, rather than solely on its objects or parts” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). In this proposed study, the
use of a phenomenological study approach will allow the researcher and readers to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjects and their role within the study. Needless to say a key feature of phenomenology involves interviewing a consistent group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

When looking at the lived experiences of participants, a full understanding of connectedness is necessary in order to develop the links and adequately comprehend the data. Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often within a first person account while avoiding abstract intellectual generalization (Finley, 2009; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, when capturing the story or lived experiences, it is necessary to have the participant recount their story from a first person perspective.

The phenomenological approach allows the researcher to go in-depth while studying a problem or phenomenon, without having to try to summarize or describe (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). Ideally, having participants revisit the phenomenon will bring their experience in the summer bridge program back to life as the data are collected. A phenomenological approach provided for a rich understanding of the lived experience and its impacts.

Within phenomenology, two main theories of text interpretation are Hermeneutic, associated with Heidegger, and Transcendental, associated with Husserl. This research study is positioned in transcendental phenomenology theory because it focuses less on the researcher’s interpretations (Creswell, 2007) in an effort to eliminate research bias. Transcendental phenomenology allows the lived experiences of individuals who participated in a summer bridge program to be explored in a way that allows others to understand their experience.
Husserl is considered the pioneer of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl identified four processes that embody the phenomenological study: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. These four processes are used to ensure that the study reflects a sense of truth and reliability. Epoche is the elimination of bias and setting aside prejudgment, challenging the researcher to create new ideas, new feelings, new realizations, and new understandings (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must be aware of their own personal bias, feelings and preconceptions of the topic so that they can view it with objectivity. When successful, the study can be conducted without the misrepresentation of participants. According to Moustakas (1994) “no position whatsoever is taken; every quality has equal value” (p.87).

Phenomenological reduction is a regimen designed to transform a philosopher into a phenomenologist (Sanders, 1997) and is a way of listening with deliberate intention of opening “ourselves to phenomena as phenomena” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 92); concentrated on aiming at and explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon. Therefore, “the quality of the experience becomes the focus; the filling in or completion of the nature and meaning of the experience becomes the college” (Moustakas, 1994, p.90).

Another dimension of phenomenological reduction is the process of horizontalization. This process forces the researcher to understand that he or she will never truly understand everything as it appeared once before. Thus, the researcher must be willing to continue to discover; it is a never-ending process, why one may reach a stopping point or discontinue the perception; the world of discovery is unlimited (Moustakas, 1994).

When looking at imaginative variation, there are varying perspectives of the phenomenon. These different perspectives come from different vantage points, such as opposite
meanings and various roles (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation enables the researcher to derive structural and textural themes that are obtained through phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994) listed four steps in imaginative variation:

1. Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings;
2. Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon;
3. Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon;
4. Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes.

(p.99)

The final step in phenomenological research is synthesis, which utilizes the ability to integrate textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience. According to Husserl (1931) (as cited by Moustakas, 1994), the true concept of essence means “that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would be what it is” (p.100). Husserl stated that, “the essence finally is radically severed from the individual appearance which manifests it” (Moustakas, 1994, p.100).

Site and Participants

The study site was a public, urban, historically-Black university (HBCU) on the east coast. Eight-three percent of students are residents of the State of Maryland. The university has a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately four thousand students. Student body demographics show that eighty-six percent of students identify as African American, and sixty-seven percent are female. Sixty-eight percent of the students attend the university full-time,
while thirty-three percent are part-time students. While the University does offer students the chance to live on campus, only sixteen percent of students choose to so.

The study was conducted using a purposeful sampling; however; convenience sampling procedures were also utilized. The selection criteria for the participants in the study include 19-21 year-old first-time, full-time, minority (African American) first-generation students who participated in the University’s summer bridge program. The participants were registered as full-time students during the interview selection period. The participants were either entering sophomores or juniors (using the University’s definition of 30 or more credits earned by the third semester to be considered sophomore status). This inclusion criterion by class was used to select students who have persisted through at least one year, and to identify students who have first-hand experience of the program.

The study selected five first-time; full-time, first-generation minority (African American) college students to participate. According to Creswell (2007) five participants allows for saturation in a qualitative study. The participants must:

a. have experienced the phenomena being studied

b. be willing to participate in a lengthy interview

c. be willing to grant permission to be taped recorded and to have information from their story published as a research document (Moustakas, 1994).

The general criteria for participation in the study were:

1. Participants are first generation college students, meaning that neither parent received education beyond high school,

2. Participants whose parents attended a 2 years or technical colleges will be excluded from the study.
3. Participants must identify as a college minority student, specifically identifying as Black (African-American).

4. The participant was a full-time, first-time direct from high school 18-20 year old entering freshman when they participated in the bridge program (The student could not have previously attended college as a degree seeking student).

5. Participant completed the summer bridge program successfully, meaning that they were not removed from or voluntarily left the program prior to completion.

6. The participant must be in good academic standing with the university.

7. Participant is currently enrolled as a full-time degrees-seeking college sophomore or junior. (The classification status will be determined by the University.)

**Recruitment and Access**

After being granted approval from both the IRB board at Northeastern University and the IRB board at the study site, emails were sent to all participants in the summer bridge program in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. A sample of the invitation email is included as Appendix IV. The documents include the contact information for the principal investigator and the researcher and a brief description of the study. The participants were given the week following the email invitation the chance to contact the researcher and provide their consent to participate in the study. At the end of the first week, a reminder email was sent to those students who met the inclusion criteria. Each participant was given a demographic survey (included as Appendix I) to determine if they met the criteria for inclusion. Once it was determined that an individual met the study criteria, they received an email confirmation from the researcher. The confirmation email informed them of the details of the study. A follow up email was sent that included the informed consent documentation (included as Appendix II), as well as sample
interview questions (included as Appendix IX) to assure that participants fully understood the scope of their participation.

Researchers face many ethical issues that can surface during data collection (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, it was very important to make sure that each participant who agreed to be involved was protected. This was done by making sure that the participants received clear information describing the type of research and the role they were expected to play during the process. When they were chosen, they were informed individually of the required time commitment for the study. Each participant was informed of how many interviews there would be, where they would be held, and who was conducting the interviews. They were informed (in both writing and verbally) that this was done on a voluntary basis and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. A copy of this informed consent is included as Appendix II.

Data Collection

Interviews are the primary means of collecting data in a phenomenological research study (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). The collection of the data for this study was conducted in two steps. The first step occurred after the participants were identified and were provided with information about the study. Each participant was asked to participate in a 60 - 90 minute interview. A copy of the interview questions is included as Appendix IX. The second step included a follow-up interview via telephone for the participants to include any additional information they wanted to add to the study. During this second step, member checking was employed. Member checking is a means of confirming that the transcripts are accurate and give participants the opportunity to add additional information to the existing data (Moustakas, 1994). In this step, participants had an opportunity to correct any information that
did not represent what they intended to communicate. The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). The interview questions were guided by the research question and aligned with the theoretical framework (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews were recorded electronically on a digital recorder, and paper and pencil note-taking was done during the sessions to maximize efficiency and to cross reference against recorded transcripts (Creswell, 2007). A sixty to ninety minute interview session was chosen to capture the “story” and experiences as recalled by the participants, as well as allow each participant a chance to reflect on their experiences, without fatiguing the participant. Interviews took place on the campus where the participants were students. The location was a mutually agreed upon safe place on campus, an individual quiet room in the student center was used. The student center was a comfortable and confidential space with appropriate seating that provides a natural, relaxed atmosphere, free from interruptions or distractions.

All interview transcripts were transcribed by a third party professional transcription company that provided confidential transcription service, with a turnaround time of 48 hours. The transcripts were reviewed immediately upon receipt and compared to the recording to correct any errors. In addition, the transcript was crossed-checked against the notes taken by the researcher. Throughout the semi-structured interview process all participants had the opportunity to address the same general questions in the same sequence. However, even though the participants were asked the same general questions, some of their responses prompted additional questions to be asked, allowing for additional information from each participant.

The researcher took into account his own beliefs and feelings. The researcher first identified what he expected to discover and then deliberately put aside these ideas; this process is
referred to as “bracketing” (Moustakas, 1994). When the researcher set aside his own ideas about the phenomenon it was possible to see the experience from the eyes of the person who had lived the experience. All of the interviews were conducted by the same person (the researcher), ensuring that the protocols were applied consistently.

The anonymity of the participants was protected. This was done by assigning each participant a pseudonym. The researcher was the only person who had access to the actual names of the participants. All flies were labeled with pseudonyms.

**Interview Questions and Protocol**

In order to gain an understanding of each participant’s experiences, semi-structured interviews were used to guide the study (Seidman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). The semi-structured interviews served as the foundation for the interviews. The ability to create dialogue and ask for further detail and clarification in the interviews allowed for a conversation that was rich with meaningful data. The data reflected the experience of participating in the summer bridge program and its impact for the participants. Qualitative interviewing protocols assume that the perspectives of others are meaningful, that they are knowledgeable, and that these insights are made explicit (Patton, 1990). While keeping in mind the impact that resiliency has on people, the interview gathered the participants’ experiences as they discussed how they matriculated from freshman to sophomore year with the resiliency that they either possessed or with the resiliency that they had developed by participating in the summer bridge program.

**Data Storage**

Throughout the study, data storage protocols highlighted security and research best practices. Seidman (2006) suggested that the information be gathered by journaling, recording, and electronic transcriptions. Protection of the data obtained is critical to maintaining the
research integrity (Creswell, 2007). The digital recordings of the interviews were stored on a password-protected computer. Digital backups were stored in a password-protected file system. Once the research was completed, all audio recordings, transcripts and written documentation pertaining to the research participants, were stored according to Northeastern University (NEU) IRB procedures, keeping all documentation for up to three years after the conclusion of the study. Thereafter, the information will be destroyed, again, according to NEU IRB regulations.

Data Analysis Procedures

Creswell (2007) described the process for conducting data analysis with a qualitative study in three steps: preparing data, coding data, and representing the data in a discussion. In addition, phenomenological analysis procedures described by Moustakas (1994) were used. Moustakas (1994) used a modified van Kaam method and manual process to analyze data. The modified van Kaam method was used to complete the analysis of the transcription of each participant in the following ways (Moustakas, 1994):

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping: List every expression relevant to the experience (Horizonalization).

2. Reduction and Elimination: Test each expression for two requirements;
   a. Does it contain moments of the experience?
   b. Is it possible to abstract and label it?

3. Clustering and Thermalizing the Invariant Constituents: Cluster the invariant constituents that are related into a thematic label.

4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record
of the research participant. If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher experience and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textual Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the *transcribed interview*.

6. Construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Structural Description* of the experience based on the Individual Textual Description and Imaginative variation.

7. Construct *for each research participant* a *Textual-Structural Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes. (p. 120)

Five key steps are involved when analyzing data: reading through the transcripts several times to obtain overall feeling, identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertain directly, formulating meaning and clustering them into themes, integrating the results into an in-depth, exhaustive description, and validating the findings with the participants (Creswell, 2007, p.89).

The researcher must first understand that regardless of the study, having a foundational understanding of the problem of practice is important to producing a great finished product. According to Sanders (1997) (as cited in van Manen, 1990), phenomenology uses a naturalistic approach to find answers to questions about the essence of the lived experience:

"From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in the factual status of particular instances: whether something happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions and events. For example, phenomenology does not ask, "How do these children learn this particular material?" but it asks, "What is the nature or essence of the experience of
learning (so that I can now better understand what this learning experience is like for these children)?" (Sanders, 1997, p. 10)

**Validity and Credibility**

The validity and credibility of this study were established in multiple ways. For example, to eliminate researcher bias, every participant was given a set of pre-determined questions before and at the start of the interview. Beyond this level of internal consistency, member checking was the most important element to add trustworthiness to the results and findings. The use of member-checking ensured that the information that was recorded is the information that was given. Member checking is a common practice that is used in qualitative studies; this ensures the ethical standards of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, once the information is given to the participant and returned back to the researcher, then and only then was the information recorded or added to the study. Having the participant review the gathered information is a good way to add value and validity to the study (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2009).

In addition to member checking, experts were expected to assess the study in order to enhance the credibility of the doctoral thesis, being familiar with the study and the information at hand. To ensure that adequate steps were taken regarding trustworthiness and validity, the study used member checking, triangulation of data and peer review.
Chapter V – Report of Research Findings

Organization of Chapter

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to address the question: How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education? This chapter first discusses the protocol for the interview questions and how these questions inform the responses that will be reported. Next, the chapter will discuss how the transcriptions were analyzed, including, coding processes that took place to report data. Participants’ background information, explaining how they became the first in their family to attend college, will be detailed. Next, staying true to the phenomenological nature of the study, textural and structural descriptions of the experience are provided. The textural description is “identifying the experience” and the structural description “builds on the experience after it has been experienced, ‘researcher makes meaning’ (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).” Lastly, composite themes from all participants are discussed, presenting the collective experiences of the participants.

Interview Questions

The interview questions for the study were pre-determined; however, the interviews began with questions about the participants’ backgrounds and educational experiences prior to attending college. The questions were guided by the research question itself (see Appendix IX). Therefore, all the questions were designed to gain information about the students’ lived experiences in a pre-college summer bridge program.

Data Analysis and Coding

The researcher followed the methods of Moustakas (1994) for the data analysis process of this phenomenological study. The use of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative
variation and synthesis allowed the researcher to separate himself from the study, gaining the true experience of the participants.

The coding of this study was done in a twofold process. The first process was done by hand, by continuously reading the transcripts and highlighting phrases or words that shared similar meaning. After employing the hand-coding approach the researcher then used MAQDX software to help with aligning the themes. This software was beneficial because it allowed the researcher to have multiple screens open at once to clearly see the recurring words or phrase that ultimately made up the composite themes in this chapter.

**Demographic Participant Data**

Table 1 shows an overview of the demographic data of the five participants. The participants were all first-generation minority college students who participated in a summer bridge program at an institution on the east coast. Table 5.1 includes participant pseudonyms, gender, age, current year in college, year participated in the summer bridge program, current overall GPA, and their mother and father’s highest grade level completed.

Table 5.1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current Year in College</th>
<th>Year in the Summer Bridge Program</th>
<th>Mother’s Highest Educational Level</th>
<th>Father’s Highest Educational Level</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelly (Female)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Some High</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty (Female)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert (Male)</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Summer 2011</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyra (Female)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Summer 2010</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summer Bridge Student Profiles**

The profiles of each participant in this section give an understanding of both the participant and the experience of being a part of the summer bridge program.

**Participant 1: Nelly’s Biographical Information**

Nelly is a 21-year-old first-generation African American college junior from inner city Houston, Texas, which she described as “the dirty, dirty.” While Texas is where Nelly grew up, that is not where it all began. Nelly was born prematurely in Chicago, Illinois to a single mother who was addicted to drugs and suffered from depression. Nelly’s mother barely had a high school education. Nelly would never come to call Chicago home because her mother quickly moved her to Atlanta, GA. While in Atlanta, Nelly said that she and her mom lived in a cult, and within the cult she was restricted from outside interaction and was forced to speak another language called “NuWaubic”. According to The Washington Post (2002) “The Nuwaubian Nation or Nuwaubian movement is well documented and began in the late 1960s and moved to Georgia in the 1990s. By 2000, at the time Nelly would have participated, there were about 500
followers.” Living in this environment for most of her young childhood, she often felt she was a prisoner. She stated, “I was kind of conformed to that land in Georgia, never really allowed to leave without supervision.” Nelly also said that while living within the cult she and her mother tried to break free, yet the people there always had a hold on what and where people would go. After years of being confined within this way of living, she and her mother were able to break free, relocating to the State of Texas. Nelly said that her mom chose Texas mainly because “the bad people” (as she called the people in the cult) would have come to Chicago looking for her. Living in Texas was supposed to bring a new beginning.

After years of living with Nuwaubians, Nelly stated that she was then free to attend regular schools with normal students. She hoped to begin living the life she always dreamed of. While attending the public school, Nelly was labeled as a “special education student.” But, she began to realize that she could do the work, finally seeing education for what it was. She stated,

I was in special education classes for about a year before taking the standardized test proved that I was actually above knowledge capacity. I was pretty much smarter than what they expected, besides me not being able to speak English. I was in special education classes for a while, until I moved to gifted and talented.

As she began high school, her mother relapsed on drugs and started dating a man, whom Nelly referred to as “my sisters’ Dad,” and started to move from house to house. Nelly recalled living in as many as 30 apartments growing up in Texas. She remembered her mother being “depressed on drugs, no stable housing and now two other children to care for she began to lose herself.” While dealing with these problems, Nelly’s mother abandoned her in Texas, and returned to Chicago, leaving the other children for Nelly to care for. As a sixteen-year-old high
school student with no resources and hope she was now, essentially, the mother of two. Nelly recalled:

We had no lights in the apartment, no food, no electricity, no gas, no nothing... I remember I didn't go to school for like a week ... The police was coming to the apartment every day to get the kids, and open the door. They would hear us in the house and knock on the door and be like, "Hey we hear you." So we'd run to the back and it was a constant struggle.

As Nelly began to come to terms with the new life she inherited, she began to envision something different and said “I said, I can't do this, I said, this is not a life that I can do.”

Textural Description

For Nelly, going to college was not something she thought of often or could even envision as being possible. As a young person, Nelly found going to school was more of a headache than enjoyable. She recalled, “I just didn’t really enjoy high school because I had to always go to school ready to fight.” She felt this way because she was “homeless and didn’t have the clothes or material things that the other students had.” It was not until in high school, during her senior year, that this changed when she met her track and field coach. She said her coach told her, “You have a lot of potential to do something with your life and could even go to college.” Nelly said that she did not believe her because no one else in her family had gone to college, and this woman was not “even a part of my family.” She was extremely apprehensive about the sheer notion of college, but the coach came to Nelly again. “’Someone wants to offer you a track and field scholarship,’ and I said, ‘Someone wants to offer me a track and field scholarship?’ She said, ‘Yeah a full ride, you don't have to pay for nothing.’”
Nelly had an “aha moment.” As she described it her coach told her, “Nelly, this happens, you use your legs to go to college. It's free money, but it's to Maryland, and you will have to attend the summer program.” The summer bridge program was a requirement for all direct-from-high-school, first-time college students planning to attend the university in the Fall. At that very moment “the fear of leaving settled inside of me and I was beginning to be reluctant.” Nelly said the coach’s words changed her life. She said, “Nelly, what have you got to lose? What's here in Texas for you?” Nelly realized that she could be the first person in her family to attend college or even get a degree. The opportunity to attend college was resting on Nelly’s doorsteps. Yet, for Nelly, one question remained: Who could help her complete the journey? For so long she had been doing things on her own and did not know who to turn to. Nelly described herself as alone in the process, with no family support, and very few connections. She was lost. Nelly said that the shelter where she lived as a homeless teenager helped her with the application process. She described this process: “They helped me send it out, like to fax it to the program. I sent them my scholarship acceptance letter; it had to be faxed back and so they did all that for me.”

As Nelly embarked on her new journey to another state, she said that she was most afraid of not fitting in or not being liked by people. In the summer bridge program, she was surprised at the level of help and assistance the program provided for students during the transition process. Nelly said the summer program helped her with the transition of college “a lot.” She said, “I wasn't really used to people, even in this area. I'm from the South; they're from the east coast.” Nelly said coming to campus in the summer allowed her to get used to her new surroundings and helped her transition to what was then the unknown. For Nelly, the program was really good at allowing her to get her “feet wet” and that it was “a stepping stone to my
academic achievements.” Nelly knew that coming to school was a privilege. She felt that she took the program very seriously because it was free and she saw the value in the preparation she was being given. She described this preparation:

A lot of times you come right from high school and you think college is going to be the same as high school, like an extended year of high school, but it's really not. It's a whole different ball game. No one in high school kind of told you what to do exactly or this is what it's going to be.

Nelly stated that while in the program it was completely obvious that the professors wanted the students to be there and really wanted to see them be successful. She shared that for the first time in her education journey she was open to learning and felt comfortable sharing when she did not know something. For example, she said,

Let’s say I wasn't doing too well on an assignment, I can always go to someone. I could talk to her, and she will teach me, hands on, this exactly what you're not doing. It was very interactive. There was nothing that I couldn't share with them, any professor, and it wasn't just her. They were really open and accepting.

Nelly went on to say that the professors in the program helped her to come out of her shell. This was good for her since she had the anxiety of engaging with new people. She said that she liked it. “Normally I don't ask questions, do my own thing. But the fact that they were open, I didn't mind raising my hand or asking a question, or sending an email out.” With the assistance of her professors, Nelly began to care even more about her level of achievement.

By having the chance to interact with the people at the school, Nelly began to feel a sense of connection with her peers and her college. Nelly stated, “College is an outlet for you to meet new people. I met new people and I got comfortable being here”. She said, “I call [the]
University home, because this is my home.” She also stated that while there, she felt that the summer bridge program encouraged students to network with one another as well as with those outside of the program. This was especially important to her because she felt that “you need someone to hear your opinions, and for you to hear their opinions, become collaborative is important in college.”

Nelly stated that because she grew up “pretty much alone” she was used to making most of her decisions on her own. In the Summer Bridge program she was first introduced to what she called a “structured environment.” As she said, the summer bridge program,

It prepared me for routine. I didn't have a routine, I just... you know in high school you wake up but I didn't really do that. In x program I knew when it was time for me to wake up, it was time to go to class. I couldn't just go to my room and go to sleep when I wanted to. It made me understand that you have to abide by certain rules still, even while in college.

This discussion of the importance of structure and rules was a continuous theme for Nelly. She talked about how, for most of her life, she had never really felt that she had the connection with other people or the chance to know what being loved felt like. The summer bridge program had rules and structure, which she credited with helping her to “wake up on time; it helped me devise my own schedule even after leaving.” She said that she gained life skills in the summer program that helped her transition to being a university student. One of the life lessons she described was learning how to prioritize in order to do work when it was given and have it done when it was expected. She believed this was extremely important when it came to the professors and their expectations in her college coursework.
Matching her behavior with academic expectations extended beyond the summer program. Nelly remembered that while this was only a summer program for incoming college students, the expectations from the summer professors were like those of the faculty during the regular school year. She said that the professors had certain expectations of what students must do, and “if you do it, you're going to pass, or you're not going to do it, and you're going to fail.” She believed having these high expectations prepared her to be her best and never settle for anything. Nelly reflected that now,

“I'm able to keep up with my due dates. I'm able to keep up with what needs to be done. Prior to this I was just, "Man, I'm going to turn it in ..." I'm forced to keep up or stay on track.”

Nelly truly enjoyed the experience in the summer program and stated,

I don't think I'd be successful without the program because I didn't have any foundation, I didn't have any groundwork. I wouldn’t have just jumped into an ocean with any assistance, with no guidance, with no lifeguard, or anything. I think the summer bridge program was like a lifeguard to direct me or like a swim coach to direct me and tell me how I'm going to handle this wave coming towards me or something like that.

Nelly indicated that she was ready for the opportunities.

**Structural Description**

Nelly endured significant hardships as a young person, which in turn made her view life in ways that are very different from the average teenager. The experience of recounting a time when she was younger allowed her to reflect on how she had questioned not only her value, but her worth. She had no consistency in how her basic needs would be met, and she described it as “grueling and scary.” A lack of any form of parental guidance made her extremely independent
at a young age. This independence merely meant that she had to fend for herself, and would even “steal food from the stores just to survive from day to day.” Nelly said, “That is not the way a young person should live.” By being able to know she shouldn’t live like that, even without the proper help from family and friends, showed that she understood that she could be and do better. Nelly was offered a chance to attend college on a scholarship and the homeless shelter that she lived in offered to help her with the college application process.

For Nelly, this experience was different. It was new and something she clearly was not used to. When she arrived at the summer bridge program there were a lot of people willing to help her and show her the way to succeed in college. This was the first time in Nelly’s life that she could, as she described it, “have someone that she could go to, or talk to about anything.” Nelly was convinced that by allowing these people to help her, she was finally able to develop a connection with a group of people. After attending the college her undergraduate years, Nelly reflected on her experiences and said that going to Maryland was extremely hard. However she had nothing back at home; it was just what she was used to. Nelly was able to use the summer bridge program to help her adjust and become accepting of her new environment in Maryland.

While the new environment offered its fair share of challenges to Nelly, they were nothing like what she experienced back in Texas. While in the summer program, Nelly began to “come out of her shell.” According to Nelly, the summer program encouraged the students to interact with one another. She began to build, what she liked to call, “a community or network of people.” This network of people became the foundation that allowed her to feel successful. Nelly would often compete with other students on grades, making her understand that grades are
important. Nelly expected more from herself because, as she said, “if other students received an A on an assignment, I wanted an A too.”

It became a competition for me with these grades, I think I let everything be a competition… like it became like I got to be better than the next person. Nobody can have a higher GPA than me. I don't care. It's no way that we are reading the same material, we are doing the same thing, there's no way you should beat me.

She was placed in an environment where others were like her and wanted the same things out of life. For years, Nelly was in an environment where she felt nothing mattered and others only looked out for themselves. The new environment of a college campus offered her a chance to feel worthy. The new environment allowed for her to have high personal expectations and meet the expectations from others.

Nelly believed that by attending the summer bridge program she was able to begin to find a balance and structure for her life. She began to realize that you need people to have high expectations of you, and that you need to have them for yourself. She also said:

I felt like I had a purpose in life rather than just walking the streets or stealing from the stores. I felt as if I can make it in college. I can help my sisters and brothers. That was the feeling I felt. I felt as if I have a token, a gift, an admission ticket to life. I can't explain… like I had an admission ticket to go somewhere to succeed. Nothing could hinder me once I got here. I felt safe, and I knew for four years I would be here.

**Participant 2: Ivan’s Biographical Information**

Ivan is a 21-year-old, first-generation African American college junior who grew up in the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland. He was raised in a single-parent home with his mother
and his older sister. While only his mother raised him, he still felt that he had a good experience. The absence of a father in the home was not something that he often thought about. While things were sometimes hard for Ivan, he believed other people experienced worse. Accordingly, he tried not to complain about the things he could not change. Ivan stated that growing up in an urban community was hard for him at times, but it was “pretty interesting and a cool experience.” He said that the experience, in retrospect made him the person that he is today.

When talking about the community he grew up in, he stated,

A lot of negativity was going on, some positivity as well, but it was definitely challenging growing up especially in a single-parent household where we didn't have much economic resources and things of that nature but, besides that, I did have a positive experience growing up in Baltimore as well.

While growing up in the “ghetto” was hard, Ivan said that he was able to meet some influential people throughout his life who had an impact on him. He shared that his mother, while not college educated, wanted him and his sister to attend college. When his sister did not attend college, he hoped he could make it happen. Reflecting about himself as a young boy in school, Ivan described how positive his mother was about education. She would put him in different programs and community organizations that were geared towards helping young, inner-city black males. He also shared that she probably only did this because she wanted him to have a male role model, because for most of his life Ivan lived without a male figure.

As a teenager, Ivan saw how that the lack of a male role model could have had an impact on who he was and what he was becoming. When he entered high school, he realized that he enjoyed the sport of running. Running was important to him, and “so were the streets and his friends.” Even though he loved running, he was reluctant to join the track and field team. He
did, but within a few months, he was kicked off the team for being disobedient to rules. Within months of being kicked off the team, Ivan began to feel like he “lost something.” Ivan had built a strong relationship with the coach and wanted him to be the person who trained him. Ivan worked hard for many months to get back on the team and when he was offered a chance to rejoin the team, he felt he could do what he loved again. He begin to see life for what it was, Ivan stated that his coach was:

   A really important person in my life overall… As a coach, he was probably the best coach I've ever had to this date in any sport. Besides him just being a coach and being able to do that really well, he was like ... not even a father figure, he was similar to us. He was alumni. He was like an older brother but he still has that authority role as coach.

   This was one of the first times that Ivan considered someone a serious male role model and a person that he could look up to with respect. Ivan began to look at life differently. He stated that even though he was kicked off the team and out of his high school, and “sent to an alternative school,” and “labeled as a delinquent,” his coach was there for support. Ultimately his coach supported him in his going to college.

**Textural Descriptions**

   College was something Ivan and his mother talked about, but was not something he considered a possibility because so many of the people he knew had not attended college. At the alternative school, he quickly realized that it was not the right place for him. Ivan said that at the alternative school he felt like he was still in the community with many of the people that he saw everyday doing the same wrong things. He worked hard to leave the school, and was eventually accepted back into a regular high school, where his coach was. He described working on his attitude and focusing on being a better student.
Ivan said that when he was in 12th grade he didn’t know what to do. Out of all of the people he knew, “very few went to college, the ones that didn’t go to college, they started a regular nine to five, or went to the military, or other things of that nature.” Deliberating about whether he should attend college or get a regular job, Ivan turned to his new high school counselor for answers. He said that his counselor was very “influential” for him in the college selection process. His counselor, he recalls “was a number one figure ... holding my hand in a sense. He was always there. He would always recommend that I get on top of taking my SAT's, applying for schools, and things of that nature.” Ivan found the help from his counselor was the start of something great. He stated that he was in college because one day his counselor went on a college tour at [The] University and, as Ivan recalls, “I believe he had my transcript with him, or something of that nature, and he said I got instantly accepted. I am not sure how the whole process went but I remember him telling me.” Ivan attributed being in college to the school counselor, concluding, “If it wasn’t for him, I may not have attended undergrad here or anywhere.”

Ivan started a new chapter in his life. He knew that the transition would be hard, but still wanted to go to college. He admitted “it was pretty intimidating,” and shared, “I’m not sure if I was actually ready for college.” Ivan said he was happy that before he actually started the first semester as a college student, he was given the chance to attend a summer bridge program. Ivan said in the summer bridge program, “We had a firsthand experience with living on campus, eating on campus and all of this was free”. He also stated that the program was good for him because it let him “feel he was attending undergrad, living in dorms, and obtaining college credits.” The college credits were extremely important to Ivan because he said that they gave him a chance to be “ahead of the game in the fall semester.”
Ivan discussed some of the program values that added to his experience while in the summer bridge program. He stated,

I think it helped with my cohorts, socializing, being able to build bonds with my fellow class members. Of course, not only a bond with them, but a bond with various staff members and advance staff members who I probably wouldn't have met or had the specific relationship I had if I had just came in during the regular semester due to schedules and being busy.

Developing a sense of community was important to Ivan, but he also enjoyed the fact that the program instilled in him the importance of education. He stated,

I brought my high school ways into the summer bridge program. So after the summer bridge program I learned a lot and I recovered from it. My studying and my whole experience with that weren’t too different from high school.

Ivan found that he really enjoyed the transition into new his environment. The transition process made him discover who he was. Ivan credits the program for his success, saying “it really helped get my feet under me. I really learned from that versus if I would've started in the fall.”

Ivan faced a big change. He went from being a student who did whatever he wanted to being in an environment guided by rules and regulations. It was somewhat overwhelming for him. When asked about the rules, Ivan said,

There were rules such as a curfew. I believe we have to be in by 8 p.m., which sucked because it was summer time and we're going to our freshman year of college. We want to enjoy the rest of our last high school summer, and various other things. But that was about it, probably just being a little confined.
While Ivan felt confined, he realized that the program was purposely designed to have the structure. Ivan felt that having less free time allowed him to become more of a responsible college student. Ivan said that while the program was really helpful he didn’t fare too well. He believed that some of the lessons learned in the program were not apparent to him until after the fact, once he was an actual student. Ivan stated,

I had a pretty good sense of what to expect, transitioning into the fall versus going into the fall blinded. That was probably the best preparation, just going to class everyday, going to the writing lab using various resources on campus. I had an idea of what to expect.

Ivan, who admitted to not doing his absolute best while in the summer bridge program, still found that the skills that he learned prepared him well. He ended his first semester of college with a 3.4 GPA. Ivan described the program as “a learning experience. In that experience, I learned a lot and my thought process changed moving into the fall semester because of that experience.” He further alluded to fact that the professor had “realistic” expectations of him and the rest of the students in the program. He said,

Even though we were college freshman or a college freshman-to-become, they still made it clear to us what was expected and they gave us a few ideas of what was to come in the fall. They gave us a heads up and some of these professors were professors that we would see again for other classes our freshman year or in our majors.

Ivan understood that this ‘community of caring’ was something he would need throughout his college experience. As a student, Ivan said that after the summer bridge program he was “happy that he went to college and felt that he was college ready.” Asked if he were to
leave the university today or tomorrow, how well the summer bridge program prepared him to be successful outside of the university, Ivan responded,

    Your freshman year is your first year. Whether you go to the summer bridge program or you come in the fall, your freshman year is a first experience in higher learning and your pursuit to your professional track. The summer bridge program contributes to experiences and things you go through and learn from there, you can utilize that elsewhere because you’ve already had that experience.

**Structural Description**

    As a young child, Ivan did not believe he was the type of person who went to college because he lacked examples of college students in his life. His mother would involve him in activities or clubs with those role models, but he still did not immediately see the value. Years later, he was introduced to his track and field coach, who made him realize that other people did care about his future. Ivan stated that he would rarely “trust people or let them get real close,” and he believed that was because of the environment in which he was raised. As a child, Ivan’s community had “a lot of negativity going on.”

    With the absence of a father in his life, Ivan relied heavily on the teachings of his mother to guide him as to how to be a man. Even without formal education beyond high school herself, his mother stressed the value of education. While Ivan did not have the opportunity of learning about college from someone with a first-hand experience, he knew that college was important from the teaching of someone he valued, his mother.

    Ivan’s experience of higher education was different from many typical college students. He was the first in his family to go to college. It was the unknown. Ivan said he was very “scared and intimidated” of the thought of college, so much so that he actually held off applying.
Yet, his high school counselor gave him the motivation to go. The counselor, according to Ivan made him feel that he was special by contacting a college on his behalf and reporting that he would be accepted. “It was a pretty good feeling knowing that, at least, I have one option.” Ivan had to balance his excitement with his fear.

Attending the summer bridge program made Ivan feel like he was part of something. Ivan admitted that he did not take the program seriously in the beginning, but he knew that he was a part of something that would help him in the long run. For Ivan this was his reality. He realized the importance of having and building strong relationships. Ivan stated that there were “various staff members and advance staff members who I probably wouldn't have met nor had the specific relationship I had if I had just came in during the regular semester.”

As the conversation progressed, Ivan seemed to take ownership in the program and the values he believed it gave him as a student. Ivan said that the program,

…gave me an advantage because, of course, with the navigating, appropriately, you also cut down on time and that's a big fact that comes into being a student, time management being an undergrad student.

Yet, the program,

…gave me a head start. I went through the program. I learned. I passed. So just having that experience of working with the different tutors, the different professors, being able to get a sense of what's expected in the fall, the socializing, the different trips, it definitely gave me a different perspective going into my fall.

Participant 3: Patty’s Biographical Information
Patty was one of the first participants to respond to the recruitment email. She was very serious about being a part of the study and sharing her story. Patty is a 21-year-old, first-generation African American college sophomore from Baltimore, Maryland. She grew up in what she called the “projects” with her siblings and her single mother. Patty lived with her mother until her mother was no longer able to care for her or her siblings. Between her mother and father’s relationship, Patty had 11 siblings in total. Patty stated that her mom “wasn’t really a part of her life for a long time.” Patty’s mom was in and out of her life, moving her from home to home. While in elementary school Patty was taken from her mother’s custody by child protective services. Patty and her siblings were displaced and removed from her mother. Patty went to live with her grandparents, who lived in Bowie, Maryland, while her other siblings were placed with various relatives. Patty said of this arrangement, “sometimes it was a struggle…sometimes it was memorable… sometimes I wanted to leave.”

For Patty, not having her mother around was hard. She stated that “even though she was really there for us when we lived with her, she still was there and I like seeing her sometimes,” Patty felt she was not ready for what she said was “a very hard separation.” Both of Patty’s parents moved away from Baltimore and relocated to Las Vegas. Patty said that while living in Las Vegas her mother was both a drug seller and abuser, and spent time in jail. Patty explained “as a child, no one should have to hear about their parents begin locked up or on drugs… that really do something to a young person and make you feel hurt.”

Even though she lived with her grandparents, she still yearned for the love and affection from her mother and father. The way Patty dealt with the situation was to take a stronger liking to school. Patty said that school was an “outlet” for her. Patty said while education was never
really talked about in her family, she remembers as a young child, “maybe elementary school,”
that she always wanted to learn. She said that,

Well, when I was younger, I used to go home and act like I was teaching the lessons that
I learned in class in elementary school to the kids [siblings]… I was like, one day I am
going to be a teacher, so I have to go to college.

Without any real guidance about college, she knew she wanted to attend because she said “my
teachers went to college.”

With the desire to attend college, Patty made sure she worked hard in high school. Patty
said that during her senior year of high school she was the class historian, making her close to
other student leaders and the school counselor. According to Patty, this high school counselor
was one of the reasons she went college. “My guidance counselor, she helped me apply for
colleges, bringing recruiters to the school, and talked about financial aid.” Because of her help
Patty was able to locate “grants and scholarships” that eventually allowed her to attend college
for free. As Patty headed for college, she felt she was prepared.

Textural Description

Patty felt that college was something that she could do. She described herself in high
school as very committed to her studies and even took pre-college courses to prepare her.
However, Patty said, “I knew what the classes were going to be like and the workload. But the
atmosphere of college? No.” She felt she did not have a real understanding of college, that it was
somewhat “scary.” But she was not too scared to accept the challenge. Patty said,

Being a girl that grew up without parents, you kind of grow a tough skin to deal with new
situation and learn how to adapt… I was used to being in situations that made me think I
was going to either sink or swim.
As a summer bridge program student, Patty understood that “you have to be ready for whatever comes your way.” Patty described being able to attend the summer bridge program “like a transition from coming from high school to college, and it prepared us for what everything was going to be like.” For Patty, being able to know what college life would be like was a benefit. Patty said that the Summer Bridge program “helped you mature… your freshman year you still don’t be acting like you’re still in high school. You get a feel for the atmosphere and for the people that you’re going to be around.” As a new student to an unknown environment, Patty needed to find friends that could “mesh” with her, saying it was really important for her. She explained, “I stayed with people that were really about their work, so I was getting my work done. Get your homework done. Not too much worried about other non-factors or whatever.” Patty valued that she was in a new place. “It opened up doors for stuff. Stuff in the fall… If things went wrong with your classes, you knew who to go here.”

Patty said that, just as important as the community, the importance of academics were also “highly stressed” by the program leaders. For her, the summer bridge program “gave [participants] the knowledge for the fall semester, so that they don’t come in with a blank mind.” As Patty explained, this was very important for students, because “if you get a failing grade, you start at a zero, you’re going to be like College is not for me and just not go.” She continued, “if you have a chance to know that you can achieve more than you will do more.” She concluded, “I think it just lets you really see what school life is about from the start. It's either you start now or give up and go a different way.”

Patty said that the expectations from the professors were a two-part process. In the beginning, she felt that they gave her work that was easy, “just to get her feet wet,” then “they show you how it was going to be.” For example,
Certain classes you had 16-page papers that you never had before. It kind of helped out to prepare for the Fall. You know you're going to have research papers, learn how to do work-cited pages. I think I did well my first year, because without the program I would have never known how to do a long paper or do a work-cited page.

She felt that the professors respected her. By giving college-level assignments, “they treated us like college students and not like we were still in high school just coming there for a summer program.” The professors’ expectations “showed us that they wanted us here.” Patty was not used to having high expectations of her. However, it was something that she could get used to, she said. Patty’s overall feeling about the summer bridge program was positive. She said, “If I didn’t come to the summer bridge program I would have just started school, I would have been stuck, and I would have been behind from the other people that came. I think it helped out.”

**Structural Description**

Patty’s ability to adapt to her new surroundings was easy and can be directly attributed to her upbringing. Patty’s response to the lack of parental support in her life growing up in the city of Baltimore was to become a survivor. She was able to learn how to bounce back from one situation to another because as a child, she had no choice but to live “pillar to post.” Not having a place to call home according to Patty, gave her two options: to either “sink or swim.” Patty resolved that she was not willing to sink. She said that she was a swimmer by force, and not by her choice. She was shaped by the forces placed before her. Within the program, she developed the skills to keep continuing to swim and move higher and higher.

Going to college was something she desired as a young child. Patty remembered playing “school with her younger sibling and being the teacher.” She was aware that there was something more she could achieve. This fueled her passion for education as a high school
student, graduating with the third highest grade point average in her class. Patty used the summer bridge program as a time to reflect on the meaning of education, and as a place where she could continue to build skills for success. Patty mentioned that she felt prepared for college by taking “college prep courses” while in high school. However, she knew that the summer bridge program could strengthen her skill set. The program was a place for Patty to make new friends that were like-minded. As a student, Patty understood that having people that “meshed” well with her was important, and valuable to her success.

One of the biggest shifts that Patty described reflecting in the summer bridge program was that she was able to build a community with people that not only support her, but care about her as well. Patty was able to see the value in other people. She said that the program allowed her to believe in what she could do with people like her. Patty was happy to be able to benefit from building that community prior to the fall classes. She stated, “You don’t come to college not knowing nobody and lonely. You come in with some friend.” She remembered thinking when she first arrived on campus, “I was like, it’s just school.” As she continued the program she realized it was more, and said, “But now it's like home. We’ve been here for so long. I like college.”

**Participant 4: Bert Biographical Information**

Bert is a 20-year-old, first-generation African American college junior from Bowie, Maryland. Bert grew up in Washington D.C., right off New York Avenue. He said that living in that part of D.C. was very tough, and that for most young people, it was hard to survive. Bert mentioned that many of the people he grew up with were arrested, sold or used drugs, or were dead. As Bert described the conditions he grew up in he said that the area he grew up in was
called “the Quarters.” Inside the Quarters neighborhood, there was “one way in and one way out.” Bert said his mother always said, “We have to get out of this place.” Bert’s mother was a single mother. He said that she raised him and his sister, who was five years older than him. While Bert’s mother was a single parent, he did know his dad. He explained “My dad... in my early childhood, I didn't know him that well. He was in and out, maybe more so in my teenage years I grew to know him.” For Bert, this was extremely hard. He reflected “I feel even more responsibility especially on a family structure. You know, with my mom, I feel like I'm the man of the house and I'm responsible.” As teenager, he would often find himself resenting his father, and he did not want him to be a part of his life. Bert said when his dad made any attempt to build the relationship, “that’s just what he did.” He said,

I didn't really welcome him in too much, because I felt like I did a lot of this stuff on my own... It was me and my mom and my sister, and I did a lot of the stuff... I had to do for myself.

Without guidance from his father, Bert found himself in trouble with school and with his mom. Bert said he would “just act out, and perform.” Bert stated, “Early on, I was a little bit of a troublemaker... My freshman and sophomore years I ended up getting kicked out right in the middle of the semesters.” Bert shared a story about a time when he was given a chance to attend a predominately white private high school. He said,

What happened was, our coach ended up getting a high school job in another part of Maryland. He just brought us all along with him. But it didn't last long... After football season was over we all got kicked out... It was a predominately white high school in St. Mary's County. It was like a 2-hour trip just to get there every day. I mean we enjoyed it for a time being, but we really just felt like we were out of our setting.
Bert said, “Looking back at it, I feel like if I was mature enough that was probably the best opportunity.” Bert was given the chance to attend three other private schools, but he was expelled from all of them for acting out. In retrospect, he wishes he “would have taken the opportunity of those situations, but... I don't have any regrets.”

Bert always knew that he was good at sports and that someday it would be his way out of the hood and towards a better life. Bert said that he began to straighten up in school when he saw that his sister wanted to attend college, but couldn’t because of money. Bert said that he told himself, 

I knew that my parents weren't going to be able to afford for me to go to college. I didn't know how the whole “FAFSA” thing worked. I really didn't have any information on that whole process, but I knew that I was always good at sports. I have seen people get scholarships and go to different schools.

He explained that his mother was very involved, pushing him to get good grades. He knew that she was there to support him mentally. Bert said that as the college application process began, he went to his coach, because neither he nor his mother knew much about the financial aid or college application process. Bert’s coach was realistic with him, and told him that he had good grades, but his test scores were not good. Bert said he “wasn’t a good standardized test-taker”.

Bert asked his coach about colleges, and his coach told him about [The] University. Bert said his coach and the coach at the University worked really hard to get him into the school. There was one condition: he had to attend the summer bridge program. Bert was extremely grateful for the coach at the University because “he gave me an opportunity when a lot of other people didn't.” Bert felt that his coaches went above and beyond, noting that without these advocates, he would have been lost. He stressed that his family cared a great deal, especially his mother, but “they
didn't know what to tell me to do… Not that they didn't care, but it was like they couldn't share any advice on something they knew nothing about.”

**Textural Description**

After years of wondering if he would attend college or could even get accepted into college, Bert’s dream became a reality. Bert said that his mom was happy and proud of him, but he was “mostly proud of himself.” He stated, “to see where I came from to where I am now is a blessing, I didn’t know if I was going to be able to really make it or not.” For Bert, being accepted to college meant he finally made it. Bert said he was not really prepared for the summer bridge program, even though he knew he had to go. When Bert started, he knew immediately that the program was not a joke. He said that the program had a lot of expectations for him and his peer cohort. Bert stressed that on the first day, the professors stated, “You are accountable for your education, not me.” Bert said they stressed the importance of that accountability because, according to them,

You’re not in high school. The teachers... The professors... we are paid to be here. You've signed up for these classes. Nobody's forcing you to be here. If this is what you want to do, you have to do it. Nobody really... To be truthful, nobody cares if you fail. If you fail, that's your fault. You didn't care about your work. You didn't care about going to class, so you had to be accountable for that kind of stuff. You had to hold yourself responsible… If you don’t focus on what you need to focus on, you will lose in the end.

Bert said he was not used to this level of accountability. He remembered when he was in high school, just weeks prior to the program, that teachers would give warnings on dates and tests, sometimes “babying you along.” But in the summer bridge program, Bert realized all of it was up to him.
Revelations came throughout the program. Bert talked about how English was his favorite subject, and he enjoyed English class. However, his English teacher in the summer program graded him harder because she knew that this was his favorite subject. He explained, “She was making us better.” Bert said,

She would give us a paper every night. Every night we had a paper like a 1000+ word paper. She loved my papers. She loved them. She would tell me she loved them. But she would grade me the hardest than she would grade anybody else in the class. I had to go back and type the paper up and do it all over again.

Bert stated that it gave him a great foundation to rest upon. For Bert having this level of expectations was good,

When I first got here, I was like, "Dang, if this is what college really is like, I don't know if I really want to be here." Then when I finished the program and I actually started a traditional college experience, it made me feel like well, I'm ahead of the pack. I know how to attack the schoolwork. I know how to go about doing what I need to do to make it so I get my work done.

The program allowed Bert to “hit the ground running” and establish vital skills that reduced the shock when he came as a true freshman. Bert said that the program allowed him to “build relationships not only with the teachers, but with the students.”

The program was something that Bert had to get used to. He struggled with the rules and regulations. While Bert did have rules as a child growing up, his experience could not compare to that of summer bridge program. Bert said that the “program ran from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. non-stop. There was always something going on and they always had a hold on your every move.” This was a challenge for Bert,
It was summertime, you know. The summertime... it's the middle of the summer. You know you want to have fun. Then you couldn't go home. But you were only allowed to go on campus and do the activities they wanted you to do.

While it was a difficult transition, Bert quickly realized the importance of what the program expected from him. The constant repetition and schedule helped him understand how to manage his time. Bert stated that while “it was like every day the same thing... that really helped me along the road ahead.”

Bert noted that the program gave each student a chance to work under an older student who served as a peer leader. The peer leaders, according to Bert, were more like mentors that he could look up to. This was beneficial for him because the leader gave him a chance to ask personal questions about the school and how college really was. Bert said the “peer leaders would share with us stories about their experience at the university and how they wish they had such a program to attend when they came in as freshman three or four years ago.” Bert said this made him appreciate the program even more, because if others saw the value, then he should as well. Bert said that support from the administration also made him feel like he was wanted and was a part of a community. This was important because he mentioned that “if it wasn’t for the program, I wouldn’t have been able to establish these kinds of relationships from an early start.”

Coming from a not-so-pleasant upbringing, and without a family that could truly understand and appreciate what he wanted to do in life, made the program very helpful. Bert said,

At the end of it when I got a 4.0 GPA in the summer, it was just like all that hard work you put in is going to pay off. I really can honestly say I feel like that experience made
me feel like I could do anything I need to do to really finish here at the university and graduate. That's the kind of experience I got from it.

**Structural Description**

Bert describes being a part of the summer bridge program as a “rite of passage.” It had always been his desire to attend college, but he lacked the confidence to believe it could be a reality. Bert grew up in a very supportive home, yet his environment was the real reason why he wanted to attend college. As a young boy Bert was exposed to a lot of gang violence and drugs. He resented that life-style. Being able to move to a new area made it possible for him to achieve different opportunities. However, even as a young boy, Bert often sabotaged himself when positive opportunities were presented. Bert’s reflections suggest that the behavior he displayed could be because he grew up without his father, or from the environment he grew up in, or both.

He remembered seeing his father “come and in out of his life.” Bert believed the only way out of the environment where he lived was through his ability to play sports. Bert recalled, I knew I was always good at sports… I don't really like when people say that's their ticket out, but that's kind of was... I knew that my parents weren't going to be able to afford for me to go to college.

Bert knew early on that if this was going to become a reality, he would have to make it happen himself. He said he realized this responsibility. “I knew the possibility of me going to college was there. I just had to be good enough in whatever sport I wanted to play in. The grades were always going to be there.”

Bert believed having a strong support system is critical. He attributes his best qualities to having great people around him who supported him as he moved along in his life. When he felt lost, trying to start his journey in education, his high school coach made him feel that he had
options. These options allowed him begin to believe in himself. Bert said that his coach “always wanted him to be in college and I thank him for that.”

The summer bridge program was a chance for Bert to take advantage of the opportunities given to him. His maturity as he saw that the opportunity afforded to him made him better. Bert said,

I feel like I've grown not only as a person… I've met important people that want me to be here, want me to finish, and want me to graduate. I feel like if it is in their power, they're going to make sure that I do everything that I need to do to make sure that that happens.

Participant 5: Tyra’s Biographical Information

Tyra is a 19-year-old, first-generation African American college sophomore from the Bay Area of California. Tyra comes from a large family. She has five brothers and two sisters between her mother and father. Some of her siblings are half-siblings from her father’s previous marriage. Tyra described growing up in her home as somewhat strange: her mother and father got married at a young age, then got divorced, and later remarried. Tyra was raised in the church. She said that church was really the central focus of her life growing up. Tyra was very active in the youth ministry and with praise-dancing. She explained that praise dancing was special to her because she was able to mix two of her favorite things, “dancing and music.” She was also able to serve God in the process. Religion was very important to Tyra because it was something that was passed down from generation to generation in her family. Tyra talked about how as a child she went to church with her mother. But, even though church was important for her growing up, her mother always stressed the importance of education.
Tyra said school has always been fun for her. She actually “liked school,” mainly because she enjoyed the challenge, and always liked learning new things. Tyra said that it was not until her senior year of high school that she began investing her energy into looking at colleges. Senior year in high school was a breakthrough year for her, as far as “understanding who she was and what she really liked to do.” Tyra shared that in her senior year she became an AVID tutor. The program was designed to help younger students adjust to high school and understand the importance of education. Tyra said,

At first, I was supposed to be just a T.A., the teacher’s assistant in the classroom because she already had two tutors; but to my surprise because of my hard work and willingness to help she asked me if I would like to become a tutor, and be more involved with the class.

For Tyra, this created a good time for her in school,

I liked the fact that I helped the kids with … I don’t want to call them kids, because we were … they were like peers, even though I was a senior, they were freshmen. I liked that I could motivate them to do better, and be organized, and actually have a part in them being successful in school; helping them through their first year of high school and everything, kind of like being a mentor. That’s what I realized about being an AVID tutor.

Tyra said that by being able to help those students in the program allowed her to appreciate her own personal mentor. While in high school Tyra was also a part of a program that helped her become the students she is today. Tyra said that she was in a program called “Young Scholars.” She explained:
…the program really made you dig deep within yourself and see where you wanted to go… the people that was in the program had your best interest and would do what they can to help you out.

Tyra said that because of the program she ended up coming to [The] University. The Young Scholars program, she explained, would “take the students on college tours and one of the college tours was here.” The tour was the deciding factor for Tyra; she liked the university, so she applied. Tyra said that her mom was happy for her decision but also a little scared because she was going to be moving from California to Maryland at 18 years old. She said that her mom told her, “Wherever you want to go, I’m going to support you.” Her mother even told her, “If it’s far away, then I still can go.” Tyra said that her mother worked for the airlines, so regardless of where she went, she can come. Tyra said that was all she needed to make the cross country move from California to Maryland.

Tyra said that it was hard because she did not have much time to transition from high school graduation into the summer bridge program. She said,

What a lot of people don’t know is, I graduated on June 15th, and I had to come right to the summer bridge program on June 16th… I was nervous; because I would be moving so far … I lived in California all my life. That was one of the things … I was just nervous to leave home, and be all the way on the other side of the country.

Tyra was scared and unsure of the situation. But she made the move to Maryland and has been looking forward everyday since.

**Textural description**

Tyra had always imagined going to college. With the help of her family and her community organizations, her dream came true. Tyra was the first person in her family to attend
college. As one of eight children, the pressure for her was sometimes overwhelming. Tyra stated that “sometimes [her siblings] would keep asking me about college and what school was I going to attend or what not.” Tyra felt the added pressure from everyone involved scared her.

She said that she always knew that she was prepared for the academic side of college. Tyra took AP and college ready courses while in high school, just to make sure she was ready. The summer bridge program was a time to meet other people and gain a connection to the school. Tyra felt the summer bridge program was for students to “make the transition from high school to college easier… It’s a program to get to know people, and get to know the campus and how things are going to be in the fall.”

Tyra was far away from home, and looked forward to being a part of a community of people that could help her come out of her “shell.” She said, “I’m very shy and quiet. I’m a really quiet person, but I’m really nice and very genuine.” She knew that it would be hard to meet people because she always “stayed to herself.”

Tyra said she could:

Go to a school, or go somewhere, and just be totally into myself, and just do my work and go to my room. I think that because I went to the program, it forced me to go out of my shell a little bit and get to know more people.

The college experience was important to Tyra because, as she said, “You just meet people from different places, and I think that’s one of the really good benefits of going to an out-of-state college, for me personally.” She believed the summer program was valuable and “having that core helped me a lot… I knew more people, so then I was comfortable to not go with just the California people.” Tyra stated:
I really enjoyed the most making new friends… That was one of the biggest things that I liked. One of the girls who … she was in one of my classes in the program, and I’d seen her around a couple of times. Now, that’s one of my best friends. Over break sometimes, when I don’t want to go home, I’ll stay at her house here in Baltimore.

The experience building a community helped Tyra overcome being a shy person and the feeling that she did not want to meet new people. Beyond making these connections, she also had the goal to be prepared.

Tyra felt that the program was effective in preparing her for college, especially with the “transition.” The transition for Tyra was somewhat “okay,” she said she felt most of the professors showed that they cared and really wanted the students there. She said,

Some of the teachers would tell us, “This is how it’s going to be,” and prepare their classwork, or the work that they would give us, they would say, “It’s going to prepare you to succeed in the Fall.

Tyra said that every night she would have to do “homework” because the teachers said it was the “way it is now.” She shared that while “in the summer program, it was only three classes, but because it was in a short amount of time, there was homework every day.” Tyra acknowledged that the structure was good for her, but said “another thing I didn’t like was that it was so many rules… After a while, you get used to it… then it didn’t really faze me.”

Tyra said that the structure of the program was something that she grew to appreciate over time. In the early parts of the program, Tyra questioned many of the rules, and felt that “if you are 18 then why can’t you walk off campus or just come and go as you please?” Tyra said being from California made her less worried about some of the rules as some of her friends within her cohort. She explained
One of the biggest things that people complained about a lot was not being able to go off campus without a peer leader. Me, personally… I didn’t have a problem with that. I wasn’t from here, so I didn’t know where to go. I know that was one of the biggest things.

She later realized the structure helped them distinguish between needs and wants. Tyra said that without the rules, many of the students might just do what they wanted and return to their old high school ways.

When asked if anything could prevent her from achieving her goal of a college degree Tyra replied,

Not really, because I’m so focused on getting one. I feel like nothing can stop me. If some financial issues came up, I would do everything; get a loan, or do anything, to get that money and pay it back to whoever I have to pay it back to, as long as I can stay in college.

Structural Description

Tyra’s family’s lack of a history of college education drove her desire to become someone who was college educated. Tyra had always enjoyed education and knew that this was the only way that she could become the person she wanted to be. From an early age Tyra was interested in school and always made sure she did well. She did well not only for herself, but also to be a model for her siblings and they were her motivation to keep moving towards greatness. She said as a child, “I was really the only one my mom focused on. I have brothers that live with me and they weren’t going so I knew I had too.” For her, the innate feeling that her mother was watching her, secretly hoping she would go to college, served as a catalyst for being the first to attend college.
Tyra used her strengths and past experiences to guide her in a positive direction. “I think when you want to help people it makes you a good person.” She described herself as someone that wanted to give back to others. By giving back to the freshman in her high school and the youth at her church, it allowed her to feel a sense of belonging and worth. The summer bridge program was also a chance for Tyra to meet new people and build relationships. Building relationships was a high priority for her, something she has valued since childhood. One of the most important relationships that she built was with her high school “Young Scholars” program. Tyra said that without that program back home, “I wouldn’t be at the university. Without that program, I wouldn’t have gone to the summer bridge program. That program was definitely one of the greatest things that have ever happened to me.”

The summer bridge program was a two-fold process that made her reflect on her reality, but accept her truth. Tyra was asked whether or not the summer bridge program changed how she felt about college, and she said,

I don’t think it did. It didn’t change it… it kind of showed me that it’s always what I thought college would be. There’s work, there’s other activities, there’s getting involved with school. There are different activities on campus, there’s different people you could really bond with… it didn’t really change it. It definitely enhanced it.

Composite Emergent Themes

The composite emergent themes were developed and guided by the primary research question of the study (Moustakas, 1994): How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education? The themes that emerged are presented in Table 5.2, and include: ‘Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their
college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.’, ‘Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.’, ‘Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.’, and ‘Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.’

Table 5.2: Participant Responses and Composite Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.</th>
<th>Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.</th>
<th>Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.</th>
<th>Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
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The composite themes emerged as the participants described how they transitioned from high school through the summer bridge program into the regular academic year. The stories they told through the interview process were distilled through careful analysis to arrive at the “essence” of the experience, the condition or quality that makes the experience what it is (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The themes identified grew out of a natural process. Tables 5.3 through 5.6 present the emergent themes by providing examples from the data collected from the participants.

**Emergent Theme #1: Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.**

As Table 5.3 shows, the first theme “Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist” stemmed from multiple participant responses. The theme is because it explains the importance of outside influences on student success.

Table 5.3:

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<th>Patty</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

*Theme 1: Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.*
<table>
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<th>Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nelly</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Patty</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Bert</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Tyra</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Each of the participants in the study was a first-generation college student, and at some point in their life, each had been in a single-parent household. The participants thought that growing up with just one parent placed them at a disadvantage. They believed the disadvantage stemmed from not having someone who could understand their story or struggle. They sometimes felt they lacked support from the parent they lived with because the parent had to focus on economic support. Both Ivan and Bert described growing up in a single parent household as hard, but lack of a male role model made it that much harder. Ivan and Bert both remembered times of feeling like they were the men of the house and it was their responsibility to keep things in order. Bert said that, “I had to do for myself and I didn't really feel like I needed him so much, but it's been a year now that my dad has passed”, so I feel even more
responsibility especially on a family structure. You know, with my mom, I feel like I'm the man of the house and I'm responsible.” For Bert having to carry this weight meant that school would sometimes take the back seat. For Ivan, he shared, “I came from a single parent house hold and my mom expected a lot from me and wanted the best for me as well.” These two men, one growing up in Baltimore City and the other in DC share the same feeling of needing support to help them grow.

Both Nelly and Patty were exposed to drugs and violence. They both came from homes where the mother used drugs and was not able to care for them. At a young age, Patty was sent to live with her grandparents and Nelly lived in a shelter for teenage girls. Nelly remembered, “I was stealing every day, and it was for my family not me… not because I wanted to buy new shoes, but because we had no food and we had no lights.”

Participants found it was family members, school counselors, and outside organizations that helped them enter students. While all participants said that their families were important, each gave credit to the people and organizations that were instrumental in their success. Tyra said the help from her school program was the backbone of her attending college. She said that,

The Young Scholars’ program offered me the highest level of assistance anyone could get, because the program is so demanding and vigorous. You have to fill out applications. One of the biggest things of the program is the college score. Regardless if you want to go to that school or not, the lady makes you fill out an application. She helped us with that; told us what to say, or how to write statements, like personal statements. She taught us so many things, like time management … so many skills that had to do with school, and also life. I think that that program … that was probably the best thing. Without that program, I wouldn’t be at the University. Without that program,
I wouldn’t have gone to the summer program. That program was definitely one of the greatest things that ever happened to me.

Tyra found her high school program was helpful for her transition. Patty credited her high school counselor.

My guidance counselor, she helped me apply for colleges and give assistance with the college application process. She also was responsible for bringing recruiters to the school to talk with us about acceptance and financial aid. Therefore, because of her I’m in school on full scholarship.

Nelly, Bert, and Ivan attributed going to college to their high school coaches. Collectively, they felt that the coaches provided them with unconditional support and showed a commitment to education. They did not believe that college could be possible until their coach showed them how it could be done. Bert said,

I never heard of the school, and I live 45 minutes away. But I would like to say the following week I came on a visit. The reason why I really came is because my coach was persistent. He really stuck with me. He wanted me to be here. I will always thank him for that. He gave me an opportunity when a lot of other people didn't.

Nelly also stated:

My coach…“god sent her to be there to help me along this journey, she was always telling me what I can do and helping me believe in the impossible… without her in the beginning things would be different, cause in Texas I had no one.

Ivan’s story was similar, “As a coach, he showed me the way in sports and academics… he would always encourage my new ideas and help me make them come to life.”
Each one of the participants understood the importance of someone helping them to become a better person and identify their goals. While each had a desire or a dream to go to college, it was not something that they could see as a reality, in part because no one in their family had ever taken this route. Bert perhaps said it best when he explained that it was not that his family or mother “didn't care, but it was like they couldn't share any advice on something they knew nothing about.”

**Emergent Theme #2: Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.**

For all the participants coming to college was something that was new and unknown to them. For that reason alone they were unsure of what to expect from the process. Each of them had to deal with coming to a new place without having a real understanding of what would be expected from them in college. This theme is defined as “Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success” and discusses the importance of expectations from the Program on student continued success beyond a summer bridge program. Representative statements from each of the participants are included in table 5.4.

Table 5.4:

*Theme 2: Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.*
Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>“She let me know what was up, you have it or you don't have it, it's an A or it's an A, it's a B or it's a B. There was no in between for her, it wasn't like teachers gave extra credit, extra credit what?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>“It really helped get my feet under me. I really learned from that versus if I would've started in the Fall and I had never gone to the summer program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>“It helped you mature. Your freshman year you still don’t be acting like you're still in high school. You get a feel for the atmosphere and for the people that you're going to be around.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
<td>“The teachers... These professors... You pay them to be here. You've signed up for these classes. Nobody's forcing you to be here. If this is what you want to do, you have to do it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyra</td>
<td>“Some of the peer leaders were there to talk and answer our questions, like, “How is it really in the Fall?” Some of the teachers, they would tell us, “This is how it’s going to be” or the work that they would give us, they would say, “It’s going to prepare you to succeed in the Fall.””</td>
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</table>

Participants collectively felt that the summer bridge program provided them with a chance to transition from high school to the college environment. They described the program as something that could help them with the “transition.” by giving them a “taste of college.” Ivan said with confidence that the program “gave me a semi-experience of what was to come during the regular academic year.” He also shared,

It gives an idea of what to expect. It's the same work. It's just condensed to the timing of the program but it's the same work. You're working with a lot of the same faculty, things of that nature. You really have a good understanding of what to expect as far as academics.

While the program gave each of them an opportunity to understand what was expected of them as college students and lessened pre-conceived anxieties about college, several participants thought that it also helped them to develop positively as a person. Patty said that the program “helped me to mature.” She continued, “Your freshman year you still don’t be acting like you’re
still in high school. You get a feel for the atmosphere and for the people that you’re going to be around.” She wanted to make sure she was around people that were liked-minded, because it gave her a chance to learn and adjust to college. Patty said the program “gave easy work to start you off… Then they move it harder to show you what it was going to be.”

The sense for establishing expectations was also shared by other participants. For example Bert said that:

Because you're not in high school. The teachers... These professors... You pay them to be here. You've signed up for these classes. Nobody's forcing you to be here. If this is what you want to do, you have to do it. To be truthful, nobody cares if you fail… If you fail, that's your fault. It means you didn't care about your work. You didn't care about going to class, so you had to be accountable for that kind of stuff. You had to hold yourself responsible.

Nelly said that the teachers,

…let me know what was up, you have it or you don't have it, it's an A or it's an A, it's a B or it's a B. There was no in between for her, it wasn't like teachers would give extra credit, extra credit what? A lot of times you expect extra credit as if it was part of an assignment. She didn't do that. It had to be done, it had to be edited right, and it had to be formatted right.

The evidence for the second theme, demonstrates similarities to the first theme across participants. Both focused on the fact that the students in the program needed to have a level of expectations set for them in order to be successful in college. This was important because it helped minimize student anxieties about their new transition. When asked what happened in the program that made them realize that this was a real reflection, Tyra said that it was not “until she
was there for about two weeks and realized that she wanted to get a degree, and knew that to get a degree she would have to work hard. Patty also noted “I think [the summer bridge program] just lets you really see life is about to start… It's either you start now or give up and go a different way.” In order for students to succeed during their first year in college as developing young adults, for example, they have to accept that college life involves adjustment that one has to be willing to make to in order to minimize the risk of academic failure.

For the participants, finally having a high expectation placed on them and having someone hold them accountable was vital to their success. All the participants found value in the summer bridge program in helping them to become stronger students and building their level of confidence in education. Ivan said, “I learned a lot and my thought process changed moving into the fall semester because of that experience.” While they did not have an understanding about what would be expected of them when they finished high school, the bridge program helped them to shape their understanding of what college was and what would be expected of them. The summer bridge program gave them an understanding of how to handle change.

**Emergent Theme #3: Community:** Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.

The adjustment to college posed a problem for all the participants as they sought to understand what the purpose of being in college was and how would they fit in. Representative statements from the participants are included in Table 5.5. The theme is defined as “Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other
students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue” and highlights the importance of developing a community of people for success.

Table 5.5:

Theme 3: Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.

<table>
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<td><strong>Bert</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Tyra</strong></td>
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Many of the participants lived in insulated communities and rarely were exposed to those outside of their network or community. They each suggested that being able to build a community at the school was one of the top priorities as they transitioned into college through the summer program. Two of the participants, Nelly and Tyra, stressed this goal more strongly, most likely because they each relocated from different states. Nelly came to Maryland from Texas, with no family to support her. She said, “For me meeting people was important and it
helped me grow.” She emphasized the importance of meeting people, saying, that the program finally gave her a foundation and an opportunity to change the course of her life. Nelly earlier described the program as a life guard for her life, and finally put her in a place of peace. Nelly was able to make new friends, and finally had the “foundation” she needed, allowing her to be free for the first time in her life. She saw herself as free for the stress of being homeless and free from not having a family or a mother. Nelly stressed those connections: “You must meet people… it’s something that you can’t seclude yourself from… even in later years the people will be there to help you up.”

Like Nelly, Tyra was away from home, having traveled from California. It was her first time being away from her mom and family on the west coast. Tyra said,

Another thing I noticed was, not only they knew where it was, but they knew more people. There were some people who came who didn’t know anyone or maybe they talked to their roommate, and that was like their first friend here. There was other people that knew more than one person: just their roommate, or people they knew in high school, or something like that.

As a shy person Tyra said she often found herself being alone and not talking to people because she was not sure what to expect. She said, “Not having to have expectations of people meant I wouldn’t be hurt in the long run.” She said the summer bridge experience helped her because,

Like I said, I got to know more people. I probably wouldn’t have had the same experience, had I not met more people, and actually knew those people. If I got here in the fall, where there were so many people, I probably would have felt overwhelmed and not given as much effort as I did in the program.
While Bert, Ivan and Patty were all from Maryland, they too felt that the program offered them a chance to engage and meet people that they normally would not have come in contact with. They were even more excited about the campus resources that the program offered. Ivan stated, “It helped me connect because I had a pretty good understanding of where most things were on campus in advance which helped me navigate a bit better and quicker in the fall. That really made a big difference.” Ivan believed understanding the campus resources made a big impact for him, he shared an example of this impact, “You know, just building connections to situations like that through places like the Career Services Center, you become a little personal with people.” Both Bert and Patty felt that having an understanding of the places to go on campus definitely made them a stronger student. Bert said it gave him “the sense of community as far as, feeling like leaders on campus when the fall came.”

The participants described building a sense of community with not only the faculty and staff, but with each other. The other students made the transition to college that much easier. They shared similar stories, about how they may have no had no one to talk to or ask questions to prior to going to college, or like Tyra being too “shy” to even ask for help. Ivan said that. “In the fall, the same resources that I had an idea about or I thought about in the summer, I actually put to work and utilized in the fall. That helped contribute to a better outcome.”

**Emergent Theme #4: Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.**

Being in a structured environment can be hard for people. This theme, “Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure”, is defined as and highlights the
importance of structure in the lived experience of students that participated in a summer bridge program. Representative student responses are included as Table 5.6.

Table 5.6:

**Theme 4: Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>“The teachers I feel like, it was the college professors who taught summer school, also taught at the university. It wasn't like we were just getting &quot;fake me out&quot; teachers; we were getting real teachers who really taught.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>“Program was really a learning process for me personally.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>“The hours were different, though. Having to wake up at 6 am in the morning, but I think I transitioned good.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
<td>“It was like every day was the same thing. That really helped me along. Because also in the program I had practice. It was like I got a real taste of what I was going to encounter in the fall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyra</td>
<td>“Having to do an activity every day after dinner. It tells you, “Get involved.” That’s how I looked at it. Get involved, get to know other people; don’t always go to the same activity every day.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demanding structure of the summer bridge program was noted by the participants. Participants stressed this theme throughout the interview process. Many of the participants grew up in homes where they were living with a single parent or in an environment that was altered with drugs and violence. For these reasons, many of the participants felt they fended for themselves and had to “learn the streets just to survive.” This was for the most part their way of life and for many of them they weren’t looking for it to be interrupted.

As the participants embarked upon the journey in the summer program they all realized that the structure of the program was something that they needed in order to be successful. However, many of them stressed that they had initial concerns, such as “feeling like a baby,” that faculty were “treating me like a kid,” or “I shouldn’t have to ask to go somewhere.” They continued, “What is this, kindergarten?” and “How can I learn how to be grown like this?” Ivan
stated that “it was just restricted in the sense that we were confined to the campus and couldn’t go anywhere for real. We weren't supposed to leave without a peer leader.”

As Ivan began to make sense of this process he said,

It helped… because it was controlled. It was a much smaller format that was more than I was used too, even though the restrictions … the restrictions were, in a sense, a part of the control but since it was controlled, we didn't have as much freedom as we would have going on regular semester. I'm sure, that was for our protection and safety and things of that nature.

Patty stressed that, for her, it was

Six weeks… that you couldn't leave. I didn't know you couldn't leave at first, but then you get used to it. Some people didn't want to leave. The hours were different, though…

Having to wake up at 6 am in the morning, but I think I transitioned good.

For Patty the structure in the program allowed her to get used to waking up on time and having a clear understanding of what to do with her time. While in the program, Patty was frustrated knowing that she lived directly down the street but could not go home. However, she said she quickly begin to accept the rules and understood their purpose.

Bert stated, “I didn't think college in general was this grueling. You have to really be mature, especially with your time.”

For Bert, he felt it hard to deal with the curfew. He said that the curfew was hard for him because he was used to coming and going as he pleased, and then “all of a sudden someone is telling you how to move about everyday.” Bert participated in the summer bridge program both as a participant and as a peer leader the following year. He said, “When I was a peer leader, I kind of understood the whole concept because these kids had to get up. Peer leaders had to get
up, so nobody could stay up to countless hours.” Even as a participant he realized the benefit and said, “It was like everyday was the same thing and you had to learn to deal with repetition.”

Nelly said the program,

… prepared me for routine. I didn't have a routine, I just, you know, in high school you wake up but I didn't really do that. In the summer program, I knew when it was time for me to wake up, it was time to go to class. I couldn't just go to my room and go to sleep when I wanted to. It made me understand that you have to abide by certain rules still, even while in college.

Therefore, for the participants, being in a program that required so much structure was hard to adjust to at first, but at the end of the experience they saw the benefit. Bert said,

It definitely was something that I felt kept me here for the long run. Had I not came, I am wouldn’t be in the position I am in today… I learned a lot. It is helping me stay focused today.

Being able to understand that something happened and how you can benefit from it is invaluable for growth. It’s equally as important for them to understand why it was bad, but equally as important to identify the problem and understand why it was or wasn’t a problem in the first place. Some of the participants understood the barriers of what they didn’t like but understood its reason later.

**Summary**

This chapter presented and summarized the data collected from the transcripts and described participants’ experiences as a part of a summer bridge program. The participants were
asked to describe their experience in the summer bridge, and the data from the interviews were analyzed and organized into four emergent themes.

In the next chapter, the themes will be discussed in terms of the central research question, the theoretical framework, and literature on the topic. Implications for professional practice will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be offered.
Chapter VI – Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of first generation minority college students who took part in a summer bridge program and to explore what impact the program had on their college success. The research question that guided the study was: How does a summer bridge program contribute to the resilience of first-generation African American students and to their increased likelihood of persistence in higher education?

Four themes emerged from the findings: “1) Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist. 2) Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided strategies for success. 3) Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue. 4) Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.” The finding reinforced the existing literature regarding the importance of summer bridge programs and their impact on student persistence in higher education. This study also addressed the gap in the literature concerning the resilient nature of first-generation African American college students’ persistence in higher education and how summer bridge programs can contribute to success.

It is important to understand that, according to Choy (2001), “As many as 82% of all students enroll in college right after high school, and 34% of all first-year college students identify as first-generation at four-year institutions, and 53 % at two-year community colleges.”
With high numbers of students graduating from high school and many of those students identifying as first-generation, it is extremely important to have an understanding of what programs and resources are needed to help these students be successful. According to Hoyt (1999), “Improving student retention does not have a simple, easy answer, it requires a campus-wide effort” (p. 62). Having programs such as summer bridge programs can serve a beacon of hope for many of these students. The findings from this study may contribute to the understanding of how first-generation African American students are able to be resilient when encountering a new challenge. Research shows that many of these students are able to remain resilient in order to be successful (Masten, 2001). This can happen for them despite the situation the students are placed in.

**Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter discusses the research findings in light of the theoretical lens of resiliency theory and to existing literature. The findings generally align with existing research conducted on summer bridge programs, and those relationships are discussed. The chapter also presents the implications for theory and practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

Therefore, when looking at Masten’s (2001) resiliency theory, the themes that are identified in this study illustrate resiliency theory for these participants as they develop the skills needed to be successful in college and progress in education despite not having influences early in their life to push them towards higher education. Resiliency theory also provided a lens through which the participants’ responses could be viewed to understand how they made sense of their experience in the summer bridge program. The following sections of this chapter will relate the theoretical framework to findings in the study, followed by the researcher’s understanding of
Review of Theoretical Framework

Resiliency theory provides a framework for understanding the ongoing development of an individual and how the continued development of resiliency within an individual leads to success for the individual (Masten, 2001). The term resiliency is used to describe a process in which a person is able to overcome a situation and adapt to the normal workings of life without interruption, despite the challenges they have faced (Masten, 2001; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Shatte & Reivich, 2002; Rutter, 1999).

While the level of adversity was different for each of the study’s participants, each reflected on challenges they faced. For some, homelessness, parental drug abuse, absent parents, or disciplinary problems were tremendous barriers to success. Being resilient does not mean the participants went through life without experiencing stress and pain. The road to resilience lies in working through the emotions and the effects of challenging and difficult events.

Study participants all demonstrated exceptional resilient behavior throughout their lives thus far. According to Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990), resilience can be broken into three categories: (a) individuals who have experienced traumatic events but have had the benefit of being able to recover well, (b) persons who belong to high-risk groups, yet have been able to have better outcomes than what was expected of them, and (c) persons who show positive adaptation despite life stressors.

Resiliency theory shed light on the participants in this study who did have the capacity to exceed the expectations others have of them prior to entering college, and that they were able to accept the encouragement of advocates who encouraged them in the direction of higher
education. The summer bridge program was able to capitalize on that resiliency that they had, and it instilled in them additional skills that they did not have already. The clear, demanding design of the program supported the development of the academic and social skills needed in order for them to be successful. The design of the summer bridge program aided in this process, by giving students the chance to experience the value of education with like-minded people who shared similar goals. It allowed for the students to understand what is and what is not going to be expected of students. According to Pike & Kuh (2005),

"An institution of higher education cannot change the lineage of its students. But it can implement interventions that increase the odds that first-generation college students get ready, get in, and get through by changing the way that those students view college and by altering what they do after they arrive.” (p.292)

The findings of this study demonstrate that a summer bridge program was an effective and important intervention for the study participants.

**Relating Findings to the Literature and Theoretical Framework**

The findings from this study connect strongly with the literature and the theoretical framework. Ackermann (1991) found that participants who were enrolled in summer bridge programs were retained at a high rate and also displayed higher academic grade point averages. Likewise, Hicks (2005) found that students who participated in a summer bridge program had higher overall grades. The findings are consistent with the literature on the impact of summer bridge programs on students in higher education.

**Findings #1: “Support”**

The findings in this research study revealed that each participant felt that it was important for them to develop a support system at the school in order to help them make the transition. The
need for community is universal as is a sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our sense of self meaningful and significant (Sergiovanni, 1993). This was a consistent theme across all of the participants. For some participants the support system was developed with fellow students, faculty, and program and university staff. London (1992) wrote that first-generation students are often loners and rarely integrate with other students and stated that these students are far less likely than other students to adapt to their new surroundings. Pike and Kuh (2005) concluded that first-generation college students may be less likely to engage in college life because they know less about the importance of engagement and about how to become engaged (p. 290). The participants in the study discussed how it was important for them to come to the university early through the summer bridge program. For each one of them, they said that the resources they received were invaluable to their success in the program and the regular year. One participant stated,

> It helped me connect because I had a pretty good understanding of where most things were on campus in advance, which helped me navigate a bit better and quicker in the Fall. That really made a big difference.

Summer bridge programs are designed to help students navigate the campus and understand the resources for them before the fall (Hicks, 2005). Many of the participants found this to be true; they began to build relationships with other students, as well. Building relationships with their peers allowed them to have a sense of connection and feel acceptance through the program. Having positive peer relationships are an important protective factor for young people as they are navigating life and finding out who they are:

> This is particularly true for young adults. Research has shown that the beneficial effects of good parenting on achievement and pro-social behavior can be constrained if
adolescents associate with antisocial peers. On the other hand, a network of pro-social peers can provide an important source of support and resiliency even in the absence of sound parenting. (Embrace the Future, 2006)

According to the study participants, having peers that “were like-minded and meshed well with them” played a role in their success both in the summer bridge program and beyond.

What is important about this finding is that it connects to the research related to resiliency in college students. According to Embrace the Future (2005), the quality of inter-personal relationships and support from outside supporters are important. Brooks (2006) also suggested that even though family has the biggest impact on development of resiliency, schools also play a major role in the positive development in the face of risk present. Stated simply by Maston (1994), when adversity is comforted and basic human needs are reestablished, then resilience has a chance to emerge. Expanding on the idea, Saleebey (2001) stated that people are more motivated to change when their strengths are supported. For the participants they not only build relationships with the administration and faculty, they also build relationships with other students. The support that the students received from the program allowed them to feel the sense of connection and belonging. Therefore, students who feel they belong are more receptive of adapting to the new change. Students who experience resilience behavior adapt to new situations when there is a level of comfort and peace (Masten, 2001). As each participant developed a level of support from the program, the support systems allowed them to develop their confidence and helped them to persist. At the same time, their resilience as individuals was strengthened.

**Findings #2: “Academic Preparation”**

It is important to understand that not all students are equally academically gifted. Yet, academic success is not something that is solely related to natural ability or intelligence.
According to Embrace the Future (2006), there are other factors involved that contribute to a student’s success in education. The level of expectations placed on them is of high priority. Masten (2001) stated that students need motivation to succeed and build positive beliefs about their own competence. Pre-college summer bridge programs ensure at-risk students have maximum opportunity and that they enter college with knowledge about the college experience and with skills for success (Kezar, 2000; Hicks, 2005). The participants stressed the importance of having high expectations to help them along throughout the college transition process. While in the summer bridge program, the students were expected to be college ready. Despite their backgrounds and perceived barriers, these students were expected to perform like typical college students. The bridge program established clear and strong expectations of behavior and supported the development of the skills and attitudes that students needed to succeed. High expectation messages communicated firm guidance, structure, and challenge. Most importantly, they conveyed a belief in the youths’ resilience and looked for strengths and assets as opposed to problems and deficits. The participants in the study collectively said that the level of work that they received from the program made them reach deeper within themselves to be successful in the program.

This study’s findings support the need to establish high expectations within the design of a summer bridge programs. The students in the study all came from families that did not understand the potential value of education and were unable to teach their student properly. While some of the participants in the study took college readiness courses in high school, three of the five participants did not. Participants credited the summer bridge pre-college experience with placing them at an advantage when it came to their adjustment into college-level work. According to Rutter (1999), institutions that hold high expectations for all their students, and
which provide the support and resources necessary for them to achieve them, have high rates of academic success. The participants in this study were also expected to behavior in a manner that was expected of college students. For example, the participants stated that they were required to dress properly every day for class. Also, they were required to attend weekly sessions on building time management and understanding how to not go into debt while in college.

Findings #3: “Community”

The results from this phenomenological study are consistent with the literature on student preparation and adjustment to college via summer bridge programs. Students come to college needing transitions into their new environment, as well as academic help (Green, 2006). The participants in the research study were all first-generation college students, and first-generation students’ adjustment to college is often more difficult (Hicks 2005), because many lack the true understanding of college. They lack parental models of college success. Second-generation college students, according to Pike & Kuh (2005), outperform the persistence rate of first-generation college students by 15%; and a disproportionately low number of first-generation college students succeed in college. Resiliency research documents clearly that the characteristics of family, school, and community environments build and foster the natural resiliency in young adults (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1999).

This study suggests that participants needed help from their community and from outsiders to help them with their adjustment to college. For example, participants in this study received help from outside sources, and most often not from family, to aid them in the college selection process. Most stated that they would not be in college if it were not for the help of teachers, coaches, mentors, or community programs. This is mainly so because the students and their parents in the study were not fully prepared or knowledgeable about how to utilize college
systems, which is consistent with the existing literature (Choy, 2001; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007). Without prior knowledge about the process, many of the students felt a sense of fear regarding higher education and the lack of esteem to even apply. For example, one participant explained how he did not even apply to college because he was sure he would not get in. Because no one in his family went to college it was not a priority. Yet, with the help of his coach, he applied and gained acceptance to the University.

According to Choy (2001), 93% of students who live in a household where at least one of the parents holds a degree will enroll in a college or university; yet for families where no parents attended college, only 59% of college age persons will enroll.

The findings in this study support these statistics. All the participants in the study are from families with more than one child; however, they were the first to attend college, even if they were not the oldest child. Each attributed their enrollment in college to having outside influences in their decision making process.

Lacking the experience of family to guide them, they relied on their advocates to help them to overcome the barriers to apply to college, demonstrating their resilience. According to Embrace the Future (2006), resiliency-promoting relationships with mentors through involvement in clubs, teams and other groups in the community help young people to develop responsibility, empathy and a sense of being valuable contributors to the community. Needless to say, they must have a culture of respect and concern for the person in order to foster resiliency. Therefore, for the participants, having this in the summer bridge program supported their ability to continue to develop and to demonstrate their resilience.

Findings #4: “Learning the Code”
Pre-college summer bridge programs are designed to meet students’ academic and social adjustment needs; therefore, they are often times “structured and administered in a variety of ways and target various student populations” (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Raines, 2012, p.30). The summer bridge program “structure” surfaced as a possible significant factor. The summer bridge program influenced them by allowing each participant the chance to understand that as young adults they would have to learn to adapt to different situations and be willing to do different things in life to be successful. It is clear from the study that the structure of the program has an impact on the way the students enter into their traditional freshman year. The findings revealed that while structure had a meaningful impact on student success in the program, the initial introduction into a structured environment proved to be a difficult adjustment for the students. Many of the participants shared stories of “feeling like a child,” and “they should not have to ask to go somewhere on campus.” The structure of the program included limiting where students could go, held them accountable to attend classes, and imposed other demands. This is in line with Raines (2012) study, which concluded that summer bridge programs should be administered in a way that promotes success. The participants stated that while the environment was controlled, it helped them learn how to accept that they are not always in control.

Students are better connected when they are placed in structured environments (Hicks, 2005). These expectations are set by firm guidance, structure, and challenge. Bernard (1991) suggested that meaningful participation and contribution include opportunities to value responsibility. The summer bridge program allowed for the students to experience college by allowing them to work with teachers who would be their instructors in the Fall, by allowing them to experience the rigors of the college curriculum and by providing them opportunities to decipher between personal time and academic time. A participant stated,
… prepared me for routine. I didn't have a routine, I just, you know, in high school you wake up but I didn't really do that. In the summer program, I knew when it was time for me to wake up, it was time to go to class. I couldn't just go to my room and go to sleep when I wanted to. It made me understand that you have to abide by certain rules still, even while in college.

For the participants, being in a program that required so much structure was hard to adjust to at first, but at the end of the experience they saw the benefit. Another participant stated,

When I first got here, I was like, Dang, if this is what college really is like, I don't know if I really want to be here. Then when I finished the program and I actually started a traditional college experience, it made me feel like, well, I'm ahead of the pack.

According to Masten (1994), programs work best building resiliency when there is an interaction between the program and its participants that results in the participants treating the program as a personal resource. Findings in the research support that the participants all felt a personal connection to the program and used the resources as a guide for the future.

**Implications for Practice**

The study was designed to hear the voices of academically resilient students and their experiences in the summer bridge program. As a result, there may be important best practices that can be gleaned from their experiences that could be adapted for use with other students. For example, first generation students, like those in this study, often did not have individuals who had experience navigating the college admissions process or knew where to go to have certain questions addressed, so these may be important skills for bridge programs to teach. Also, time management was emphasized by the participants. Seminars introducing time management techniques appear to be a beneficial aspect of summer bridge programs.
The themes from the study have practical implications for professional practice in higher education. This is important when schools want to understand what they can do to help the success of first-generation African American students.

In order for a college or university to provide the best possible opportunity for success they must be willing to provide a support system that can help student with their transition. By looking at these students as resilient, institutions will be able to have a clearer understanding of how this population known as “at-risk” can bounce back and be successful despite challenges and risk. In order to develop a program that supports the first-generation African American student population, this research found the following to be important: designing programs that build a sense of community, providing support with the transition to college, allowing for a structured environment, and having expectations that guide success.

**Outreach**

The findings in this research study suggest that students must be in an environment that will make them feel connected and accepted. Having students integrate prior to the opening of the academic year can include talks/discussions/panels with various staff members with whom the students may need to interact during their first year. This will support the students by giving them a chance to believe in themselves, and it will also allow for the student to become connected to the college or university. Student who are connected are integrated because they are prepared and willing to learn. Providing students with peer mentors who can answer questions for them about the school and community is another approach. Future programs should provide a place where building relationships and the interactions with other students are reinforced on a daily basis.

**Support**
The study revealed that having a supportive environment allowed the students to begin to trust themselves and their academic potential. By providing students with opportunities to develop and identify as college students early is important. Students who build confidence early will be more likely to succeed (Hicks, 2005). Summer bridge programs should offer academic readiness workshops for students to strengthen their academic skills. Classes offered at the college level and with a relationship to the level of work performed during the academic year are recommended. Also, allowing the students the chance to navigate the campus is essential, so a campus resource tour and a library tour build the knowledge so that students know where to go if assistance is needed.

The major implication from resiliency research for practice is that if we hope to create socially-competent people who have a sense of their own identity and efficacy, who are able to make decisions, set goals, and believe in their future, then meeting their basic human needs for caring, connectedness, respect, challenge, power, and meaning must be the primary focus of any prevention, education, and youth development effort (Embrace the Future, 2006).

**Implications for Future Research**

This study adds solid information to the research literature and practical field about how to support first-generation African American students in higher education. Nevertheless, the research on this topic is far from complete. The need to continuously address this population is extremely important if we want to close the gap in achievement. Ideas for further research include a quantitative research study of the program and see how this population of students differs in achievement from other population of students who attended summer bridge programs. Another study could compare and contrast this same population of students against those at predominantly white institutions, or other groups of students. The perceptions of faculty and
staff who take part in the program could also be studied to see if students and faculty perceptions align within the program goals.

A final suggestion would be a program evaluation or a case study to examine all levels of the summer bridge program and how the entire program aligns its goals, missions, and values. While these suggestions are important in the study of first-generation African American college students, hearing their lived experience and understanding the meaning of how they were able to overcome the barriers they faced has great value. Institutions planning to provide students with optimum opportunities for success must be willing to implement programs, such as pre-college summer bridge programs, that assist first-generation students in their transition and make their success more likely (Hicks, 2005; Kezar, 2000; Levitz & Noel, 1989).

**Limitations of the Study**

The study included five first-generation African American college students who participated in a university summer bridge program directly from high school. The participants in the study all completed their first year of study satisfactorily and were progressing through the university as full-time matriculating students at the time of the study. It is important to understand that the study is only reflective of the participants who participated, and it is important to know that other students, who met the same criteria, might have different outlooks or experiences.

Another limitation of this study was the sample size and study site, a medium-size public Historically Black College/University (HBCU) on the east coast. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria for participation, being first-generation college students and being African American college students who had participated in a specific summer bridge programs may have also limited the study. According to Green (2006), this population is often the hardest population of
students to integrate into the mainstream college population; yet, there are many facets to consider when addressing this need. The findings in this study only address this population of students who attended such a program at an HBCU. Another limitation was finding students who wanted to participate in the interview for the study, and their desire to be included may have impacted the data collected.

**Summary**

The participants in the study shared their lived experiences of how each became the first person in their family to attend college and how being a part of a summer bridge program prior to college aided in the development of their resilience and in their success. The findings revealed that first-generation African American college students are better prepared for college when they are placed in an environment that shows support, has structure, can build community and has high expectations. While this important for many of the nation’s college students, first-generation African American students especially need these supports because they are often facing challenges unique to them, such as lack of knowledge about college and fears about their own readiness or lack of academic preparation. This study shined light on the persistence and drive of African American first-generation college students and how willing they are to be succeeding in higher education. However, the key to their success is derived from the inventions and programs that are in place to help them be successful. The Key findings in this study included the following themes “Support: Receiving support from outside of the family helps support students in their college transition process; outside influences encourage them and bolster their resilience, increasing the likelihood that they will persist.’, “Academic Preparation: The Summer Bridge Program helped students prepare academically and adjust to college expectations before starting in the Fall semester, which increased their confidence and provided
strategies for success.’, ‘Community: Building meaningful relationships with not only faculty, but also with other students, was valued by the participants because these relationships anchored them in their new environment and gave them resources that helped them continue.’, and ‘Learning the Code: Success depends on adapting to the rules and structure.’
References


APPENDIX I

Demographic Survey

Please complete this survey and email the completed form back to the Doctoral Candidate, Michael Durant, Jr., at Durant.m@husky.neu.edu

Full Name (Print):______________________________________________

What's your current age?________________________________________

Current Classification and Credits earned to date:____________________

Year Participated in Summer Bridge Program:_______________________

Current GPA:__________________________________________________

Mother Highest Grade Level:_____________________________________

Father Highest Grade Level:______________________________________

Thanks you for taking time to complete the Survey!!!

APPROVED

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection
Rev. 5/2013
APPENDIX II

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, School of Education

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Principal Investigator: Carolyn R. Bair, PhD

Student Investigator: Michael Duranti, Jr., Doctoral Student, [redacted]

Title of Project: College Resiliency: How summer bridge programs influence persistence in full-time, first-generation minority college students.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the resiliency first time, first-generation minority college students that participated in a summer bridge program. The topic for this study is "College Resiliency: How summer bridge programs influence persistence in full-time, first-generation minority college students".

The researcher will explain more about the study and you may ask any questions that you have. You do not have to participate but if you decide to, please sign this statement and the researcher will give you a copy to keep.

There are no reasonable foreseeable risks, harm, discomfort, or inconvenience from participating in this study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, your answers may help us inform college and universities of the benefit of having summer bridge programs.

Your participation in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researcher will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to
participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will receive access to the study’s findings during the data analysis phase of the study and you will be asked to validate the accuracy of your responses. You will also receive access to the findings at the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:
Carolyn R. Bair, PhD., Assistant Academic Specialist in Higher Education Administration at Northeastern University, Tel: [redacted]

Michael Durant, Jr., Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University, Tel: [redacted] Email: Durant.m@husky.neu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact:
Nan C. Regina, Director of IRB, Northeastern University, 960 Renaissance Park Boston, MA 02115 Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu

You may call anonymously if you wish.

Print Name: __________________________

Signature: __________________________

Date: __________________________
APPENDIX III

Email requesting students to participate in a Phenomenological research study for a Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University

Date: 2/27/2014

Greetings Summer Bridge Participants,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Michael Durant and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University. I will be finishing the last stage of my Doctoral degree by conducting a study on students that participated in the university summer bridge program. My research topic is as follow: “COLLEGE RESILIENCY: HOW SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS INFLUENCE PERSISTENCE IN FULL-TIME, FIRST-GENERATION MINORITY COLLEGE STUDENTS.”

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study that will tell their individual lived experience of participated in a summer bridge program and how being a part of the program had an impact on persistence from freshman to sophomore year.

If you decide to participate in this study, you would be asked to participate in interview(s) explaining your experience during participation in the university summer bridge program.

Your participation would involve an interview session (possible a 2nd interview if more information is needed), which is approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length.

Participation is entirely voluntary; you do not have to participate.

If you plan to participate in this study, please complete the attached Demographic Survey. This survey will determine if you meet all the qualifications for the study.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Michael Durant, Jr., Northeastern University Doctoral Candidate

Tel: ******
Email: Durant.m@husky.neu.edu
APPENDIX III

Email informing students they did not meet qualifications to participate in a Phenomenological research study for a Doctoral Candidate at Northeastern University

Date: 2/27/2014

Greetings Summer Bridge Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. I am extremely pleased that you wanted to participate in the research study on “COLLEGE RESILIENCY: HOW SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS INFLUENCE PERSISTENCE IN FULL-TIME, FIRST-GENERATION MINORITY COLLEGE STUDENTS.”

Unfortunately, after reviewing the demographic survey, you don’t meet the qualification.

Again, I truly appreciate you being willing to participate.

If you need to speak to me personally, please contact:

Michael Durant, Jr., Northeastern University Doctoral Candidate

at

Tel
Email: Durant.m@husky.neu.edu
APPENDIX V

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: March 6, 2014
IRB #: CPS14-02-08

Principal Investigator(s): Carolyn Bair
Michael Durant, Jr.

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: College Resiliency: How Summer Bridge Programs
Influence Persistence in Full-Time, First-Generation Minority College Students

Participating Sites: [Redacted]

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: MARCH 5, 2015

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
APPENDIX VI

Outline Summary of the Phenomenological Model

Clark Moustakas, Phenomenological Research Methods, p. 180-182

Processes

Epoche

Setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence

Phenomenological Reduction

Bracketing the Topic or Question Horizonalization: Every statement has equal value Delimited Horizons or Meanings: Horizons that stand out as invariant qualities of the experience Invariant Qualities and Themes: nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping constituents clustered into themes Individual Textural Descriptions: An integration, descriptively, of the invariant textural constituents and themes of each research participant Composite Textural Description: an integration of all of the individual textural descriptions into a group or universal textural description

Imaginative Variation

Vary Possible Meanings Vary Perspectives of the Phenomenon: From different vantage points, such as opposite meanings and various roles Free Fantasy Variations: consider freely the possible structural qualities or dynamics that evoke the textural qualities Construct a list of structural qualities of the experience Develop Structural Themes: cluster the structural qualities into themes Employ Universal Structures as Themes: Time, space, relationship to self, to others; bodily concerns, causal or intentional structures Individual Structural Descriptions: For each co-researcher, integrate the structural qualities and themes into an individual structural description of the experience

Synthesis of composite Textural and Composite Structural Descriptions

Intuitively-reflectively integrate the composite textural and composite structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience

Methodology

Preparing to Collect Data
1. Formulate the question: Define terms of question
2. conduct literature review and determine original nature of study
3. Develop criteria for selecting participants: Establish contract, obtain informed consent, insure confidentiality, agree to place and time commitments, and obtain permission to record and publish
4. Develop instructions and guiding questions or topics needed for the phenomenological research interview

Collecting Data

1. Engage in the Epoche process as a way of creating an atmosphere and rapport for conducting the interview
2. Bracket the question
3. Conduct the qualitative research interview to obtain descriptions of the experience.

Organizing, Analyzing, and Synthesizing Data

Follow modified van Kaam method or Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method Develop individual textural and structural descriptions; composite textural and composite structural descriptions, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences of the experience

Summary, Implications, and Outcomes

Summarize entire study Relate study findings to and differentiate from findings of literature review Relate study to possible future research and develop an outline for a future study Relate study to personal outcomes Relate study to professional outcomes Relate study to social meanings and relevance Offer closing comments: Researcher’s future direction and goals
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Michael Durant successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 03/29/2012
Certification Number: 897172
APPENDIX VIII

Consent to use Interview Questions

Doctoral Thesis Material Request
3 messages

Michael Durant <durant.m@husky.neu.edu>
To: Brian J Murphy Clinton <b.murphyclinton@neu.edu>

Tue, Oct 1, 2013 at 11:22 AM

Dear Dr. Murphy Clinton:

I hope this email finds you in good health and spirit. My name is Michael Durant, Jr., and I’m a Doctoral Candidate (ABD) in the EdD program at Northeastern University. I am in the interview question writing stage of my thesis and I read your dissertation (which was remarkable) and I grew very fond of your interview questions. I am writing to request permission from you to use some of your research questions in my study. I am only looking to use the current student interview question section from your thesis.

My research topic is very similar to the one in which you did for your thesis, my topic is: College Resiliency: A phenomenological study on how a summer bridge program help build resiliency for full-time, first-generation minority college students, helping them to persist from freshman to sophomore year.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to consider my request to use some of your interview questions in my research study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Michael Durant, Jr.

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Murphy Clinton, Brian <b.murphyclinton@neu.edu>
To: Michael Durant <durant.m@husky.neu.edu>

Tue, Oct 1, 2013 at 11:28 AM

Hi Michael,

Thank you for the note! You can absolutely use the interview questions for your study. Sounds like a great topic that you are studying and would love to see the final results. I would not rule out talking to
Best of luck in your writing and I look forward to seeing you cross the graduation stage soon!

Regards,

Brian

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Brian Murphy Clinton, Ed.D.
Executive Director, Enrollment Management
Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115-9959

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From: Michael Durant <durant.m@husky.neu.edu>
Date: Tuesday, October 1, 2013 11:22 AM
To: Brian Murphy Clinton <b.murphyclinton@neu.edu>
Subject: Doctoral Thesis Material Request

[Quoted text hidden]

Michael Durant <durant.m@husky.neu.edu>
To: "Murphy Clinton, Brian" <b.murphyclinton@neu.edu>

Greetings Dr. Murphy Clinton,

I can truly appreciate your quick reply and your willingness to allow me the opportunity to use a section of your research questions. Again, your study was so professionally done I found myself reading the entire thesis.

Maybe in the near future, I will be calling on you to serve as my external reader if the opportunity presents itself.

Thanks so much again and I am looking forward to joining the many NEU Doctors one day soon!

Respectfully,

Michael Durant, Jr.
[Quoted text hidden]
APPENDIX IX

Interview Questions

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Principal Investigator: Carolyn Bair, PhD

Student Investigator: Michael Durant, Jr., Doctoral Student, (410) 262-9902

Title of Project: College Resiliency: How summer bridge programs influence persistence in full-time, first-generation minority college students.

Interviewees:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. We have reviewed the consent form together and you have been provided a copy of the form for your records. You have given your verbal consent to participate. This interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and is being audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only. The information shared in the interview will be confidential. Your name will not be included in this study to protect your privacy. Next we are going to talk about your experience in a summer bridge program and your history of how you became the first person in your family to go to college. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

A focused life history of the participants experience as a high school student and how they became the first person to attend college… (Research Question #1) 20min-30min Length

1. Tell me about yourself?

2. Tell me a story about a time when you enjoyed attending high school?

3. Tell me a story about when you were in your elementary or secondary years when you first realized that you wanted to go to college?
4. Did you receive assistance from family member, guidance counselors, or community base organizations during the college application process? If so, can you describe the level of assistance you received? How important was this assistance?
5. In your own assessment, do you feel that you were prepared for college coming out of high school?

*We are now going to begin the second part of the interview that talks about your experience in a summer college bridge program. Participant describes their experience in a pre-college summer bridge program… (Research Question #2) 20min-30min Length*

1. In your own words, describe the pre-college summer bridge program?
2. Why do you think the pre-college summer bridge program was created?
3. Please tell me about the parts of the summer bridge program you enjoyed the most?
4. Please tell me about the parts of the summer bridge program you enjoyed the Least?
5. Which part of the summer bridge program do you feel best prepared you to be successful during you freshman year of college?

*Now we are going to moves to the last stage of the interview. Next we are going to discuss how you made meaning of your pre-college summer bridge experience … (Research Question #3) 20min-30min Length*

1. What barriers, if any, do you see as preventing you from earning a college degree?
2. Do you feel that you would be successful in earning a college degree without participating in the pre-college summer bridge program?
3. What do you feel is the beneficial component of the program for student persistence?
4. Have being a part of the pre-college summer bridge program change the way you think about college? If yes, how?

5. If you leave (the university) do you feel that the pre-college program would have help you with the new transition? If yes or no, why?

6. Did the summer bridge program experience change the way you felt about college? If yes, how?

7. Do you have any further thoughts about the pre-college program that you would like to share?
APPENDIX X

Debriefing Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, School of Education
Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Principal Investigator: Carolyn R. Bair, PhD
Student Investigator: Michael Durant, Jr., Doctoral Student, (410) 262-9902

Title of Project: College Resiliency: How summer bridge programs influence persistence in full-time, first-generation minority college students.

I am thankful for you time and feel encouraged by you desire to help the university understand the true benefit of the summer bridge program you participated in during either the summer of 2011 or 2012, more importantly I am excited that the information that you shared will be of great importance to future programs and help making them successful for first-generation minority college students. Just as a reminder, what you have shared with me will be added to the research along with the other participants to help understand the impact of the summer bridge programs on student persistence.

Please don’t forget that I am always available to answer any questions that you may have about the research study. You can call me, Michael Durant, (410) 262-9902 or email Dr. Carolyn R. Bair c.bair@neu.edu. If at any point you feel or experience stress after completing the interview (s), please contact me as soon as possible so that I can help ease your stress level or discomfort. The study can be mailed one completed, if you would like a copy please let me know.

I wish you continued success at the university and as a future college graduate.

Respectfully,

Michael Durant, Jr.
APPENDIX XI

Conditions before Approval –

Addendum

1. Methods and Procedures: Indicate total number of interviews and when each will be conducted. 
There will be 5 to 8 student participants selected to participate in the interviews. Each of the participants will participate in a 60-90min interview. The participant’s interviews will be conducted within one week of gaining full approval from both Coppin State University and Northeastern University IRB departments. Also, no interviews will be conducted until a final approval letter from Northeastern University IRB department is given to Coppin State University IRB Department.

2. Risk: Identify and include the possible risk and how to handle them
Technical Risk – What if the digital recorder break doing the interview phase and loose value data from the participant?

How to handle it: The researcher will have a backup recorded for that purpose and will be taking notes as the interview is being conducted on a legal note pad.

Schedule Risk – How will the researcher and student agree upon a mutual meeting time?

How to handle it: The research will give each participant a chance to select between 5 -6 different meeting times for the 60-90min interview.

Interpretation Risk – How would the researcher make sure what the participant stated is represented in the manuscript?

How to handle it: The research will eliminate all preconceived emotions and prior knowledge while transcribing the data.

Cost Risk – How will traveling be arranged for the participants?

How to handle it: The researcher will conduct all the interviews on the campus where the students either live or attend school. No travel arrangements required.

Psychological or Emotional Risk – What if a student becomes distressed after answering a question or finishing the interview?
**How to handle it:** The researcher will address the situation immediately and follow up with the student after the interview is finish, or discontinue the interview all together if the risk is too high. Also the research will provide the students with a referral to the counseling services provided at the selected campus.

3. **Informed Consent: Information below will be included**

**Technical Risk** – What if the digital recorder break doing the interview phase and loose value data from the participant?

**How to handle it:** The researcher will have a backup recorded for that purpose and will be talking notes as the interview is being conducted on a legal note pad.

**Schedule Risk** – How will the researcher and student agree upon a mutual meeting time?

**How to handle it:** The research will give each participant a chance to select between 5 -6 different meeting times for the 60-90min interview.

**Interpretation Risk** – How would the researcher make sure what the participant stated is represented in the manuscript?

**How to handle it:** The research will eliminate all preconceived emotions and prior knowledge while transcribing the data.

**Cost Risk** – How will traveling be arranged for the participants?

**How to handle it:** The researcher will conduct all the interviews on the campus where the students either live or attend school. No travel arrangements required.

**Psychological or Emotional Risk** – What if a student becomes distressed after answering a question or finishing the interview?

**How to handle it:** The researcher will address the situation immediately and follow up with the student after the interview is finish, or discontinue the interview all together if the risk is too high. Also the research will provide the students with a referral to the counseling services provided at the selected campus.
APPENDIX XII

Approval To Conduct Research Involving Human Participants

To: Principal Investigator Dr. Carolyn R. Bair
From: Dr. Michelle P. Poister, Chairperson, IRB
Project: College Resiliency: How Summer Bridge Programs Influence Persistence in Full-Time, First-Generation Minority College Students
Student: Mr. Michael Duran
Date: December 11, 2013

On behalf of the IRB at [University Name], I am pleased to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Please note that this approval covers one year, beginning with the date above, and it assumes that you agree to the following items prior to beginning the data collection.

1. The IRB does NOT approve research already completed, and your signature below confirms this research has NOT been completed or started. You should sign this form, obtain the student's signature, and return this signed form to Dr. Poister in the Department of Applied Psychology & Rehabilitation Counseling for her signature. You should retain a duplicate of this signed document for your records.

2. You should have a copy of this signed approval document with you as you administer the research project.

3. You should forward a copy of this document to your Dean or other designated person, if required.

4. You must honor the standards of confidentiality and informed consent as stated in the policy of the Institutional Review Board.

My best wishes to you for the successful completion of this research project.

[Signature]
Dr. Michelle Poister, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: 1/6/2014

[Signature]
[Signature]

Date: 2/1/13
APPENDIX XIII

Northeastern University
Institutional Review Board

Assurance of Principal Investigator

Investigator(s): Carolyn R. Bair, PhD

Title of Proposal: College Resiliency: How summer Bridge Programs Influence Persistence in Full-time, First-generation Minority College Students

To give assurance, please read and initial each statement, then sign below.

1. I have read and understand Northeastern University’s Policies and Procedures Concerning the Protection of Human Subjects and the Federal Wide Assurance. I give my assurance that I, and all members of the research team, will adhere to the policies in this research.

2. I assure that no participants will be recruited or enrolled, and no data will be collected, without current, written approval from Northeastern University, and other sites as required.

3. I assure that the rights and welfare of all participants will be protected according to the procedures approved for this project by the NU IRB.

4. I assure that all risks or discomforts to subjects will be clearly explained, and that I will demonstrate how risks are outweighed by potential benefits to the subject or by the importance of the knowledge to be gained.

5. I assure that the informed consent of all participants will be obtained by methods that meet the requirements of Northeastern University’s policy and assurance procedures.

6. I assure that no changes in research activity will be initiated without prior NU IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazard to the subjects.

7. I assure that I will report any problems involving risks to human subjects or others promptly to the Office of Human Subject Research Protection.

8. I assure that there are no financial or other relationships (e.g., stock ownership, advisory board, speaker’s bureau, honoraria) that might be viewed as creating a conflict of interest.

Signature: ______________________ Date: 02/18/2014

Principal Investigator / Faculty Advisor

For student research, the faculty advisor is the principal investigator for the study and is primarily responsible for the ethical conduct of the research. Faculty must review and approve student research prior to submission for NU IRB review. Student investigators must sign the Assurance also.

Signature: ______________________ Date: 2/18/2014

Student Investigator

DEPARTMENT CHAIR/PROGRAM DIRECTOR SIGNATURE (Required):
I am aware that this protocol is being submitted to the Northeastern University IRB. I do not make any assertions about human subject protections for this research project.

Signature: ______________________ Date: ______________

Department Chair or Program Director

Please return completed form to Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection with the exception of forms from faculty and students of the College of Professional Studies, which should be submitted to Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator for CPS.

Nan C. Regina, Director
Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection
360 Huntington Avenue, Mailstop: 960 Renaissance Park
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Tel: 617.373.4588; Fax: 617.373.4595; n.regina@neu.edu

Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator
Northeastern Univ., College of Professional Studies
360 Huntington Avenue, Mailstop: 20 Bevidere
Boston, MA 02115
Tel: 617.373.6659; Fax: 617.373.6600; k.skophammer@neu.edu

NU HS-IRB - Rev. 9-3-2013

CPS forms only

NU HS-IRB - Rev. 9-3-2013
APPENDIX XIII

Michael Durant, Jr. Biographical Information

Michael Durant, Jr. is the Assistant Dean of Student Academic Services at Becker College in Worcester, MA. In his role as Assistant Dean, Michael will have total oversight of all student support services units at the college, including the Collaborative Learning Center, the Office of Disability Services, the Office of First Year Experience, the Office of Sophomore Year Experience, Supplemental Instruction and Learning Communities Activities, and the Office of Academic Advising.

Michael is a native of Baltimore, Maryland and has dedicated his life to the betterment of the post-secondary experience of first generation and minority college students. Michael has extensive experience within the field of Higher Education, including his experience prior to coming to Becker College; he worked in the Division of Academic Affairs at Coppin State University. While at Coppin, Michael’s responsibilities were in Academic Resources, Advising and all retention efforts for incoming first year students by planning and coordinating programming, departmental collaborations, leadership development and supervision of professional staff, and student tutors. At Coppin, he earned the “2010” Advisor of the Year Award for his work as an advocate for student achievement and for the various programs he coordinated. Prior to his employment at Coppin, Michael worked in Higher Education at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, Middle Tennessee State University and University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Currently a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at Northeastern University, Michael is studying Higher Education Administration with a cognate in Curriculum, Teaching and Educational Policy Administration. While at Northeastern his research focuses on the Resiliency of First Generation Minority College Students. Michael has plans of defending his Dissertation in the upcoming months. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) in English Literature from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a Master of Education Degree (M.Ed.) in Higher
Education Administration from Middle Tennessee State University, and a Specialist in Education Degree (Ed.S.) in Curriculum and Instruction from Middle Tennessee State University.

His affiliations include Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.; Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society; Sigma Tau Delta International English Honors Society; Alpha Delta Pi Education Honors Society; Golden Key Honors Society; National Academic Advising Association (NACADA); National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA); National Association of Minority Educators; American College Personnel Association (ACPA); and National Association of Multicultural Education.