The Relationship Between At-Risk College Students’ Participation in Arts-Based Cocurricular Activities and Academic Resilience

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience. The primary research question guiding the research was: How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience? The theory-driven research question was: To what extent does this experience work as a mechanism to foster resilience?

This study applied the qualitative methodology of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the participants’ lived experiences. The researcher interviewed seven at-risk college students. The researcher analyzed the data which yielded four superordinate themes: sense of belonging, sense of meaning, personal growth, and situational pressure. The data also revealed that participation in cocurricular provided the three external protective factors that foster resilience: caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation. The five recommendations for practice address the problem of very low graduation rates for at-risk college students.

Keywords: academic resilience; at-risk college students; arts; cocurricular activities; interpretative phenomenological analysis; resilience; retention;
Dedication

To my wife Sandra whose never-ending support and love has seen me through this journey and many others. I could not have done this without you. I love you.

To my beautiful daughter Leanne Barbara Parks, you have given me purpose in life. You inspire me everyday to be a better father, husband, and person. I love you.
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Pursuing a doctorate is quite a journey, especially starting one when most of my friends and colleagues are only a few years away from retirement. Always knowing that I wanted to learn more and to be able to have a greater impact, I decided to begin this journey that has lasted for four years. Spending this much time on a long-term project may be the epitome of delayed gratification and growth mindset. Raising my daughter while trying to work and finish the degree was stressful for our family. I could not have accomplished this without the love and support of my beautiful wife Sandra. My daughter Leanne has no memory of her father not being a student. Her love is my greatest inspiration.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Statement of the Problem

College graduation rates in the United States are very low. Fewer than 40% of students who enroll in a public four-year degree program graduate within four years and fewer than 60% of students graduate within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The statistics are more startling for at-risk students. Only 11% of low-income, first-generation students obtain a bachelor’s degree within six years of matriculation (Pell Institute, 2011).

The issue with retention is most evident during the first year of college. Data submitted by the American College Testing Program (ACT) shows that as recently as 2012, almost 30% of matriculated freshmen drop out of college prior to beginning their second year (ACT, 2012). Furthermore, low-income, first-generation students are four times more likely than other students to drop out before the second year of college (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

The United States has seen an increase in the number of students enrolling in college every year since 1970 (Aud, et al., 2012), and the United States ranked first in the world in four-year degree attainment for many of those years (The Executive Office of the President, 2014). However, as of January 2015, the United States ranks only 12th in the world for degree completion (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015). Obtaining a college degree is more important than ever before in the nation’s history, and the President of the United States has called for the U.S. to regain the number one spot for college graduation rates in the world by 2020 (Cassazza & Silverman, 2013). A priority towards degree completion rather than just college matriculation is needed, as well as tools to enable this shift in order to address this problem. One tool that has proven successful in retention is student participation in cocurricular activities.
Participation in cocurricular activities has a profound impact on student retention among first year college students (Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2007). Cocurricular activities are defined as single-domain structured activities that meet regularly and are outside of the regular curriculum yet are sponsored, sanctioned, or supported by the school (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). Cocurricular activities can include athletics, student government, honor societies, fraternities or sororities, service organizations, residence life programming, performing or visual arts, campus newspapers or other publications, and religious groups (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). According to Kuh, et al. (2007), no other factor has a more significant impact on student persistence than the number of hours spent on cocurricular activities.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience. The following questions will guide the research:

Primary research question: How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience?

Theory-driven research question: To what extent does their experience in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities work as a mechanism to foster resilience?

Significance of the Problem

Problem from practice. The impact of not obtaining a college degree at the individual and societal level is quite significant. The job market is changing and there are fewer jobs for those without a college degree because of automation, offshoring, and the shift to the knowledge economy (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Additionally, the unemployment rate is significantly lower for those with a college degree in contrast to those without. The United
States Department of Labor (2014) released data from March 2014 that showed the unemployment rate for those with a college degree at 3.4% and those without still above 9%. This data reveals the disparity between college graduates and those with no college degree. According to the United States Census Bureau, the lifetime earnings for a person with a bachelors degree is more than $1.5 million more than someone with no college degree (Julian, 2012). Additionally, it has been projected that approximately half of the fastest-growing industries that will experience hiring growth over the next few years will require a college degree as a minimum requirement for hiring consideration (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

More than 7.8 million jobs were lost in the great recession and this figure does not account for lost growth that normally adds 100,000 jobs per month (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Carnevale et al. (2010) further posit that, “Hundreds of thousands of low-skill jobs in manufacturing, farming, fishing, and forestry have been permanently destroyed because the recession has further prompted employers to either automate those positions or ship them offshore to take advantage of cheap labor” (p. 6). Even as new jobs are added to the economy, many new jobs added will require greater training then those outsourced or eliminated, with many demanding a college degree (Carnevale et al., 2013). It is estimated that by the year 2020, more than 60% of the 46.8 million created jobs will require either a bachelor’s degree (or higher) or at least an associate’s degree, and this will cause a shortfall of millions of eligible candidates due to there not being enough qualified applicants (Carnevale et al., 2013). The value of a college degree is great and its value is only appreciating.

The importance of a college degree represents a major change for American society (Carnevale et al., 2010). Whereas a college diploma was once the preferred path to the middle class status, “it is increasingly the only pathway” (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 13).
At-risk students are less likely to remain in college, therefore it is important to understand factors that may contribute to their success. Research has found that participation in cocurricular activities is one factor that impacts students’ decision to stay in school (Kuh et al., 2007). However, little is known about the role of participation in arts-related cocurricular activities.

**Problem from theory.** Resilience theory is not new, however, applying resilience theory to cocurricular participation and college persistence is a shift in theoretical approach. Research has shown that involvement in cocurricular activities has a positive affect on persistence and the more hours spent in cocurricular activities the greater the odds are for persisting (Kuh et al., 2007). No research has been discovered to date that uses Benard’s (1991) environmental protective factors to describe how involvement in cocurricular activities can foster resilience in at-risk college freshmen. This shift in theoretical approach is needed to better understand how building resilience can help at-risk students persist.

**Problems from research.** There has been a call for more research pertaining to academic resilience with there being “relatively little work into academic resilience” (Martin & Marsh, 2009, p. 367). Previous research has been conducted on persistence through the lens of resilience (Hartley, 2010; Khademi & Aghdam, 2013; Martin & Marsh, 2009; McIntyre, et al., 2003; Morales, 2008) however, none has been found yet that studies how cocurricular participation may or may not act as a mechanism to foster resilience in at-risk college students. There is also a disproportionate amount of research conducted on the individual and the family protective factors to the exclusion of the environmental factors (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Conducting research that explores the relationship between cocurricular activities and resilience through the lens of environmental protective factors will fill a gap in the literature.
Theoretical Framework

This study will be framed by resilience theory. Resilience describes the phenomenon of good outcomes in spite of past and/or current risks (Masten, 1994; 2001). Theorists’ definitions are similar but can have slightly different wording. Luthar et al., (2000) describe resilience as a “phenomenon of competence despite adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000 p. 554). When a person is labeled resilient, they have adapted over time either internally and/or externally to “developmental risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities” (Masten, 1994, p. 5).

Additionally, one must experience a threat or hindrance to normal development as a preexisting condition to building resilience (Masten, 2001). Therefore, the criteria needed for resilience include exposure to stress and the successful adaptation despite the stress (Masten & Tellegen, 2012).

Resilience is not a trait but a “dynamic developmental process” (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 546) and is a “common phenomenon that results in most cases from the operation of basic human adaptational systems” (Masten, 2001, p. 227). No matter the context, protective factors (attributes that contribute to positive outcomes) and risks factors (attributes that contribute to negative outcomes) affect resilience development, and through the process of introducing protective factors and/or reducing risk factors, resilience, even in the most severe cases, can be fostered (Masten, 2001).

In fact, research has shown that protective factors are much more predictive of positive outcomes than risk factors are predictive of negative outcomes (Benard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1992). Thus, over time a shift in the literature occurred from identifying risk factors to identifying protective factors (Benard, 2004; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).
More recently, resilience researchers are calling for more work to be done to not only identify protective factors that foster resilience but to study how the protective factors work as mechanisms in the protective process (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1987). Luthar and colleagues (2000) call for researchers to switch their focus from identifying protective factors to “understanding the mechanisms by which such protection might be conferred” (p. 555). This presents a shift from determining what a protective factor is to how the factor contributes to resilience (Masten et al., 1990).

There are three main reasons why academic resilience theory, with a focus on the three environmental protection factors, will be the best framework for the current study. First, there has been a call for more research pertaining to academic resilience with there being “relatively little work into academic resilience” (Martin & Marsh, 2009). Second, previous research has been conducted on persistence through the lens of resilience (Hartley, 2010; Khademi & Aghdam, 2013; Martin & Marsh, 2009; McIntyre, et al, 2003; Morales, 2008), however no research has been found yet that studies how cocurricular participation may or may not act as a mechanism to foster resilience in at-risk college students. Third, there is a disproportionate amount of research conducted on the individual and the family protective factors to the exclusion of the environmental factors (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Conducting research that explores how cocurricular activities may foster resilience through the lens of environmental protective factors will fill a gap in the literature.

**Academic resilience.** During the last half of a century of resilience research, researchers began applying the construct of resilience to different contexts. Due to this, it became important to identify the specific context in which the construct was being studied by using adjectives to describe the work (Novotny, 2011; Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). The early 1990s marked
the beginning of specific research on academic resilience and included researchers such as Benard (1991), Freiberg (1994), Alva (1991), Floyd, (1996), and Finn and Rock (1997) to name a few.

Academic resilience can be described as successfully overcoming major threats to educational development (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Low-income, first-generation college students are already at risk of dropping out of college, and according to Martin and Marsh (2006) “academic resilience is relevant to all students because at some point all students may experience some level of poor performance, adversity, challenge, or pressure” (p. 267). These experiences are not only risk factors that contribute to low academic achievement, but also can lead to dropping out (Alva, 1991).

Academic resilience is a contemporary theoretical approach to persistence and incorporates environmental protective factors that work as a mechanism to foster resilience. However, although involvement in cocurricular activities is often cited as a protective factor that can foster resilience (Benard, 2004; Freeman, 2004; Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009; Finn & Rock, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; McMillan & Reed, 1993; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado & Cortes, 2009; Werner & Smith, 1992), no studies to date have been found that investigate specifically how cocurricular activities foster resilience and therefore promote persistence.

This study will be framed generally by academic resilience theory, and specifically by the work of Benard (1991, 2004), using her three widely accepted environmental protective factors associated with academic resilience. These include caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation (Benard, 1991, 2004). These factors, although described separately,
work interactively and synergistically to foster resilience (Benard, 2004). Henderson (2012) posits that cocurricular activities can provide each of these protective factors.

**Definition of Terms**

The definitions provided below are of the key terms in this study. Most of the definitions are agreed upon in the main resilience research and the citation from the researcher whose definition is most inline with this study is given.

**Academic Resilience.** Academic resilience is overcoming threats to educational development (Martin, 2013).

**At-risk student.** A student whose background experiences, intrapersonal character, interpersonal character, and/or environmental factors that can lead to negative academic outcomes (Chen, 2012).

**Competence.** Adaptation to a successful developmental level for that person’s age, based on expectations on that person’s culture or society. Or levels of achievement in specific areas such as academics or sports (Masten & Coatworth, 1998).

**Cocurricular.** Single domain structured activities that meet regularly and are outside of the regular curriculum yet are sponsored, sanctioned, or supported by the school. Synonymous with extracurricular (Gardner, Browning, & Brooks-Gunn, 2012).

**Protective Factors.** Attributes that contribute to positive outcomes (Masten, 2001).

**Resilience.** Resilience describes the phenomenon where positive life outcomes happen in spite of past and current risks to those positive outcomes (Masten, 1994).

**Risk Factors.** Any part of the individual or environment and the interaction between the two that can contribute to negative outcomes (Hartley, 2010).
Vulnerability. Vulnerability describes a state in which people may experience negative life outcomes due to being exposed to risk factors (Werner, 1993).

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the statement and significance of the problem the perspectives of practice, theory, and research. Additionally, the theoretical framework of academic resilience was also introduced. Key definitions were defined and the researcher’s positionality statement was presented.

The following chapter will present a literature review of the history and evolution of the construct of resilience and academic resilience as well as prior theories used in persistence practice. Also, literature will be presented and reviewed detailing the magnitude of the issue of retention as well as the value of a college degree and the state of the current economy. In chapter three, the methodology for this research will be presented including rationale as to why a qualitative design using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach is the best fit for this study.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Participation in cocurricular activities has a significant impact on student persistence (Kuh et al., 2007). The data show that the more time participating in cocurricular activities, the greater the likelihood of persisting to the second year of college (Kuh, et al., 2007). There is a correlation between participation in cocurricular activities and the fostering of resilience (Freeman et al., 2004; Feinstein et al., 2009; Gardner et al., 2012; Henderson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1993; Perez et al., 2009; Werner & Smith, 1992), in particular the three external protective factors of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation (Benard, 1991; 2004). The following review of the literature is presented in five sections. The first is the significance and value of a college degree along with the impact the current economy has on the degree value. The second section presents the literature found regarding at-risk students. The third section identifies the issue of retention for college students. The fourth section reviews the literature as it pertains to the history, evolution, and current trends of resilience theory. The fifth section reviews the literature associated with the positive impact that cocurricular participation has on college retention.

The Value of a College Degree

The value of a college degree is greater today than ever before and will continue to increase (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). The great recession caused job loss, stifled job creation, and many jobs have been permanently deleted, automated, or outsourced to other countries (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 10). As a result, as the economy recovers, many of the jobs lost will be replaced with jobs that may have higher minimal education expectations (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). This need for more educational credentials has increased the importance of obtaining a college degree. This section of the review of the literature details the state of the
economy, how the value of a college degree will continue to increase, and how the high school degree alone is no longer sufficient for personal economic stability.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) identified the beginning of the Great Recession as December of 2007. The date marked the end of 73 months of economic growth (NBER, 2008, p. 1) and ended in June 2009 (Lockard & Wolf, 2012, p. 85). During this time, millions of jobs were lost (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 9). Additionally, many jobs that only required a high school education were lost during the recession and will not come back due to the jobs becoming automated or outsourced to other countries (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 6). Economists believe that the economy will fully recover by 2018 and that more than 15 million new jobs will be added to the economy during this time (Bartsch, 2009, p. 8; Lacey & Wright, 2009, p. 82). However, according to economists Emily Richards and David Terkanian (2013), both with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many of the jobs created will require a post-secondary degree as the minimum level of training.

During the recession, a college degree afforded the best protection against unemployment (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 6). Statistics from the United States Department of Labor show that the unemployment rate for those with a college degree was below 5% in September 2011, while those with no college remained above 9%, and those with some college (including a completed associate’s degree) was above 8% (United States Department of Labor, 2012). As the economy improves and the overall unemployment rate drops, the United States Department of Labor (2014) released data from March, 2014, that showed the unemployment rate for those with a college degree at 3.4% and those without still above 9%. This data reveals the gap between college graduates and those with no college has widened.
Additionally, companies are hiring more college graduates. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2013), employers planned to hire 7.8 percent more college graduates in 2013 than they did in 2012. That gain was improved upon with the report in 2014 that showed employers were going to hire 8.6 percent more college graduates in 2014 than they did in 2013 (NACE, 2014).

Not only does a postsecondary degree protect against unemployment, its value over a lifetime is also growing. From 1999 through 2009 the gap in lifetime earning between an adult with a bachelor’s degree compared to an adult without widened from 75% to 84% (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013, p. 45). The lifetime earnings for a person with a bachelor’s degree is more than $1 million more than someone with no college degree (Carnevale et al., 2011, p. 3; Julian, 2012). Since 1983, workers with a bachelor’s degree saw their earnings increase by 34% (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 4). There is even a disparity between workers within the same occupation. Truck drivers with a bachelor’s degree have a higher lifetime earning then truck drivers with only a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2011, p. 2). Additionally, the value of only obtaining a high school diploma is diminishing. In 1970, high school graduates with no college degree made up 60% of the middle class, whereas in 2007 this same population made up only 45% percent (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 3).

In addition to the estimated 13 million jobs that employers will add to the economy by 2018, there will be close to 35 million job openings due to retirement or workers who switch occupations (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 13). More than half of these will require a bachelor’s degree or higher and this will cause a shortfall of millions of candidates due to the lack of a college degree (Carnevale et al., 2010, p. 13).
Prior to the recession that began in 2007, the economy was already shifting to one that favored a college degree over a high school diploma. Carnevale and Desrochers, researchers with the Education Testing Service, have written extensively about education and the effects of the economy on education. In their 2003 report, *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform* they posit that:

The fundamental change in the economic system has been the shift from the industrial era to the postindustrial era of the knowledge economy. It has become commonplace to note that in contemporary America, postsecondary education and training have become critical to individual and corporate economic success. This commonplace observation is hardly news in the 21st century, but would have been an odd idea if offered in the first three quarters of the 20th century. Until the 1970s, the United States’ economic dominance rested on a solid agricultural and manufacturing base wherein workers with high school or less could provide a comfortable living for their families. However, since the 1980s, increases in global competition and domestic deregulation have altered the underlying structure of the existing economy in ways that have made postsecondary education the price of admission to the American middle class. (Carnevale and Desrochers, p.8)

Two occupations illustrate the authors’ points. Both factory jobs and natural resource jobs (farming, fishing, forestry, mining) have seen not only shrinking total numbers of workers over the past few decades but the number of workers in these fields with college degrees has increased (Carnevale, Strohl, & Smith, 2009, p. 24). This shift in the economy combined with the effects of the recession and the aging baby boomer population that is beginning to leave the work force have all combined to create a kind of perfect storm that necessitates a college degree over a high
school diploma for economic independence (Carnevale, et al., p. 1, 2011; Richards & Terkanian, 2013).

According to the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Educational Statistics, more students graduated high school in 2009 than ever had any previous year since national records were available (U.S. DOE, 2012). However, even though the data shows the positive effects of a college diploma, and families see the value of a college education, fewer then six out of ten students who matriculate college graduate within six years (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 4; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012, p. 483; Shapiro et al., 2012, p. 5).

At-Risk Students

The literature regarding “at-risk” students seeks to primarily answer the question “who drops out of school and why?” (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Fox, 2012; Bulger, & Watson, 2006; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011; Chen, Kaufman, & Frase, 1997; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Rumberger, & Lim, 2008). These studies provide characteristics that are commonly observed in students who dropout than those who do not.

The definition of an at-risk student is one who will likely drop out of school before graduation (Kaufman & Bradby, 1992, p. 2). According to Liontos (1991) the term evolved from “high risk” which was used in the literature beginning in 1980, but by 1987, “at-risk” was used to describe “school and academic failure, potential dropouts, the educationally disadvantaged, and under achievement” (p. 5). Liontos (1991) further argues that the term at-risk has become “cliché and unfortunately is used both as a description and a prediction” (p. 5).

The term has its roots in the K-12 literature (Bulger & Watson, 2006). The first article to use the term was a publication written by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, titled
Barriers to Excellence: Our Children At Risk (1985), which was written in response to a White House publication from two years prior titled, A Nation At Risk (Liontos, 1991). Although its roots are from the K–12 literature, eventually the higher education literature too began to incorporate the term to describe college students who will likely not finish their degree program.

The most salient characteristic common to students who dropout revealed in decades of research is low socio-economic status (SES). According to the American Psychological Association (2007), individual socio-economic status is often measured by education, income, and occupation. For students, in both primary and secondary schooling, it is the parents’ education, income, and occupation that are measured (Cowan, et al., 2013). Liontos (1991) argues that poverty is the “bottom line” of risk factors and has the greatest impact on educational under-achievement. Children from low-SES homes are more likely to begin school already behind in math, reading, and behavior skills needed for learning (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Lower SES families may lack resources, such as books or computers, compared to their higher SES contemporaries. This affects educational attainment not only during the school year but also during the summer months when there is no school (McLoyd, 1998). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Rosen, Chen, & Ingels, 2015) ninth-graders from the lowest SES quintile dropped out at the same rate as ninth-graders from the top three SES quintiles combined.

Race is also associated with higher school dropout (Cairns et al., 1989). Black and Hispanic students are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school than their white counterparts (Chapman, et al., 2011). Although the statistics for minority student dropout are confirmed across many studies, some argue that it is a consequence of lower SES status and that a higher percentage of minorities comprise the lower SES levels (Dunham & Wilson, 2007).
Other at-risk characteristics found in the literature that contribute to dropout include living in a single parent family (Bulger & Watson, 2006; Chen & Kaufman, 1997; Horn, 1997; Kaufman, 1992; Liontos, 1991; Rumberger & Lim, 2008;), having an older sibling who dropped out of school (Bulger & Watson, 2006; Chen & Kaufman, 1997; Horn, 1997; Kaufman, 1992; Rumberger & Lim, 2008), having repeated a grade (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Bulger & Watson, 2006; Cairns et al., 1989; Chen & Kaufman, 1997; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Horn, 1997; Kaufman, 1992), and parenthood (Cairns, et al., 1989; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Although each of these characteristics can contribute to school dropout, any combination of two or more can significantly increase the likelihood of dropping out (Cairns et al., 1989).

At the secondary level, the two most indicative characteristics for dropping out include low-income and first-generation student status. The government defines a first-generation student as a student from a family that neither parent has obtained a bachelor’s degree and defines low-income “as an individual whose family’s taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Post Secondary Education, 2014). Data collected and analyzed by Engle and Tinto (2008) show that only 11% of at-risk students graduate with a bachelor’s degree within six years of matriculation. Engle and Tinto (2008) state that the “combined impact of these two characteristics put students…at the greatest risk of failure in postsecondary education” (p. 6). The combined risk factors of low-income and first-generation are also in line with the federal government’s guidelines for pre-college and in-college support programs (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Beginning in 1964, the United States Congress passed a series of programs designed to help Americans “overcome class and social barriers to higher education” (Grout, 2003). Over the past 50 years these programs, most commonly known as the TRIO programs, have grown to eight
different programs and in 2013-2014 more than $750 billion was awarded to 2,791 projects (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Post Secondary Education 2014). As required by federal law, at least two-thirds of participants in these programs must be both low-income and first-generation with the remaining third needing to be one or the other.

**Retention and Attrition Issues in Higher Education**

From 1983-2012, less than half of college students who matriculated into a public four-year college obtained a degree within five years (ACT, 2012). Alarmingly, almost 30% of the students who drop out of college do so prior to their second year (ACT, 2012, p. 5). Data collected from the ACT (2012) between 1983-2010 shows only 66.7% of all freshmen persist to become sophomores. This same data shows that in 2004, only 51.3% of freshmen at four-year public schools returned to the same institution the following year. As many as 35% of students depart a university for academic reasons with the other 65% departing for other reasons such as adjustment problems, financial issues, or poor fit (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012, p. 483). The numbers are more alarming for at-risk students, those who are low-income and first-generation. For these students, only 11% will persist to graduate within six years (Pell Institute, 2011).

High attrition rates are not a new phenomenon. Researchers claimed decades ago that higher education institutions were making retention a priority in order to maintain enrollments (Braxton, Brier, & Hossler, 1988, p. 241; Tinto, 1996). The cost of dropping out of college is great to the student (Nguyen, 2012), the college (Raisman, 2013), and society (Schneider, 2010), and makes student retention for first year college students a priority for students and colleges.

More than half of all college freshmen use student loans as a resource to pay for attending their institutions (Nguyen, 2012). From 1996 to 2009, the number of borrowers who dropped out of college without ever finishing their degrees increased from 20% to 29% (Nguyen, 2012, p. 5).
These drop outs are now saddled with repayment of student loans but are not reaping the financial rewards of obtaining a college degree. For these non-graduates, their chances of finding employment are less than those with a degree (Carnevale, et al., 2010; Raley, 2007; Nguyen, 2012; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), and their earning levels will be much less than those who obtain their degrees (Carnevale, et al., 2010, p. 5; Julian, 2012; Pennington, 2004, p. 19; Raley, 2007, p. 5). As a result, borrowers who drop out of college are four times more likely to default on their loans (Nguyen, 2012, p. 5).

The cost of attrition to colleges is great as well. For every student who drops out, the college loses planned tuition, fees, and other revenue generators such as room and board (Raisman, 2013). In an analysis of 1,669 colleges and universities in the United States, Raisman (2013) determined that these schools lost more than $16 billion due to attrition between 2010-2011, with the average school losing $9 million dollars due to student attrition. Not only do colleges suffer economically, but the state and Federal Government suffer economic losses due to attrition as well (Schneider, 2010).

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development no other country spends more money on higher education than the United States (OECD, 2013). Unfortunately, billions of dollars are lost due to student attrition after the first year of college. State governments spend money in two ways to support colleges: appropriations, and grants. Between 2003-2008 state governments lost $6.2 billion in money appropriated to colleges on students who did not return for their second year of school (Schneider, 2010). During this same time period, grants to students who dropped out prior to their second year cost states $1.4 billion and the Federal Government $1.5 billion (Schneider, 2010). This is a total of $9.1 billion dollars of taxpayer money lost over a period of five years due to first-year college attrition.
Early approaches to retention. Although attention to student transition to college has been gaining momentum, this is not a new phenomenon. Prior to 1890, both Johns Hopkins and Harvard University formed groups of faculty advisors for freshmen in order to address issue of retention (Hunter & Murray, 2007). In the early 1900s many schools, including Boston University, University of Michigan, and Oberlin College formed non-credit freshman orientation classes to address students’ “special needs unique to the first year” (Hunter & Murray, 2007, p. 28). During the 1980s and 1990s, universities created thousands of first year programs with the purpose to improve college retention rates (Barefoot, 2000, p. 14).

Researchers have long tried to identify the causes (and cures) of college attrition. Two seminal theories have been popular in the literature for decades. One theory developed is Vincent Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory (1975) and the other is the Theory of Involvement developed by Alexander Astin (1984).

Tinto (1975; 1996; 2001) posited that the reasons a student leaves a university include: academic difficulty, adjustment difficulties, uncertain goals, lack of student commitment, financial issues, lack of student involvement, and poor fit or incongruence issues. Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory (1975) argued that both academic and social integration affect student persistence and that the greater the degree of social integration the greater the level of commitment to the university. Tinto suggested that institutions find more ways to engage students in and out of class thus strengthening the student’s commitment to the school and eventual graduation.

Almost concurrently, Astin posited his Theory of Involvement (1984) while researching the causes of college dropouts. His 1977 longitudinal study of over 200,000 students focused on the effects on different types of student involvement including “place of residence, honors
programs, undergraduate research participation, social fraternities and sororities, academic involvement, student-faculty interaction, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government” (Astin, 1985, p. 37) and found that the more involved a student was with their college the greater likelihood that the student would graduate.

His theory succinctly explained much of the previous research relating to environmental influences on student development, and it combined principles from different fields such as psychoanalysis and classical learning theory (Astin, 1999, p. 518). Astin (1999) defined student involvement as:

the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (p. 518)

Astin (1999) further defined a non-involved student as one who does not participate in extra-curricular activities. His study showed that students who participated in cocurricular activities of “almost any type” were more likely to persist (Astin, 1999, p. 523). Although Astin’s research identified many environmental factors that have a positive impact on student persistence, his findings regarding the positive effects of cocurricular participation on persistence further validate the connection between cocurricular activities and persistence.

Other educational researchers including Pascarella, Terenzini, Boyer, and Kuh also contributed to the Theory of Involvement (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012, p. 483; Tinto, 2005a, p. 3; Tinto, 2005b, p. 2) and helped usher in what Tinto (2005b) referred to as the “age of involvement” (p. 2). According to Tinto (2005b), these researchers “learned that involvement
matters,” and “that it matters most during the critical first year of college” (p. 2). Involvement in both social and academic activities is strongly related to retention (Beil, Reisen, Zea, & Caplan, 1999 p. 377; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012, p. 483).

One attribute that positively affects college retention is how well a student fits in socially with the institution (Raley, 2007; Braxton, et al., 1988). This “fit” can be described as the traits that a student brings with them to college including: family background, race, family social economic status, religious beliefs, and secondary school achievement (Braxton et al., 1988, p. 243; Tinto, 2004, p. 8). In fact, many academically underperforming students persist in college because of their successful social integration (Kennedy, Sheckley, & Kehrhahn, 2000). Some students may fail to integrate socially due to their own culture or values not meshing or fitting in with those found at the college attending (Raley, 2007, p. 3). Examples of this could include students of a particular religion not having a place to worship on campus, or those with a particular diet not being accommodated in dining halls, or a lack of other students from the same ethnicity (Astin, 1984, p. 524). Cocurricular activities can provide this social fit for many students. More than 800,000 high school students, almost half of those who took the ACT in 2012, indicated that they participated in cocurricular activities (ACT, 2013). These activities can provide a shared experience for college freshmen and help them find their fit.

Both Tinto and Astin’s theories are seminal approaches to address the issue of persistence. However, there are two shortcomings that necessitate a shift to studying persistence through a different lens, the lens of resilience. First, the majority of higher education research related to persistence has used the frameworks forwarded by Astin and Tinto. However, our understanding of persistence may be enhanced through the lens of other disciplines. Mohrman and Lawler (2012) posit that for research to be useful it should contain perspectives from
multiple disciplines. Resilience theory is rooted in diverse disciplines including psychology, psychiatry, and education. Second, an argument can be made that through “social integration” and “involvement”, students build resilience and it is this resilience that fosters their persistence. Resilience integrates aspects of both Astin and Tinto’s theories, as well as aspects that are not included in their frameworks.

One tool that colleges and students use to socially integrate and become involved on campus is participation in cocurricular activities. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), involvement in cocurricular activities has a significant impact on student persistence (Kuh et al., 2007).

**At-Risk students and retention.** According to Engle and Tinto (2008) at-risk college students are four times more likely to leave higher education after their first year than their non-at-risk peers and they graduate from public four-year colleges 43% less than students not at-risk. Bulger and Watson (2006) define at-risk students as students who are “poorly equipped to perform up to academic standards” (p. 24). In their article titled “Broadening the Definition of At-Risk Students”, Bulger and Watson (2006) group risk factors and variables into three categories of background characteristics, internal characteristics, and environmental factors and provide many examples of each. The list of risk factors can be very long and although many factors can be identified, many, if not most, are the consequence of two overarching factors that the literature has used to group the risk factors for the past 50 years. These are being a first-generation and a low-income student.

In 1965 the federal government set these two factors as the basis for the federally funded TRIO programs that funneled hundreds of millions of dollars to low-income and first-generation students. The federal government defines low-income students as those whose family income
does not exceed 150 percent of the federally-established poverty level for their family size the preceding year (Higher Education Act of 1965). Additionally, the Federal government defines first generation college students (FGCS) as those students who neither parent has obtained a baccalaureate degree or in the case of a student who was raised by only one parent if that parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act of 1965).

**Cocurricular activities and retention.** Extra-curricular activities are defined as single-domain, structured activities that meet regularly and are outside of the regular curriculum yet are sponsored, sanctioned, or supported by the school (Gardner et al., 2012; Mahoney et al., 2003). Activities can include athletics, student government, honor society, fraternities or sororities, service organizations, residence life programming, performing or visual arts, campus newspaper or other publications, and religious groups (NSSE, 2010). The list of activities is diverse.

These activities are also called cocurricular. Both describe activities outside of the classroom and are used interchangeably by student affairs personnel as they both describe the non-curricular type activities of the college (Storey, 2010, p. 24). Changing the verbiage to cocurricular, or activities that enhance or benefit the curriculum, is a more contemporary way to describe the same activities that were once labeled extra-curricular.

In 1937 the American Council on Education Studies published a paper titled the Student Personnel Point of View. This paper outlined the philosophy of student development and recommended that in addition to regular classroom instruction that certain “student personnel services” including “extra-curricular activities, social life, and religious life” be added to the objectives of colleges (American Council on Education, 1937). The paper further argued that the implementation of student personnel services was a “major concern” so that colleges would begin to develop the total student not just the academic aspects (American Council on Education,
Conversely, almost a decade later, Goldberg (1946) wrote a theoretical article published in the Journal of Higher Education simply titled “Extra-curricular Activities.” In it, Goldberg states that participation in extra-curricular activities should be only for the joy of that activity. He does concede that there could be some positive outcomes of extra-curricular participation later in life but calls these assumptions “sketchy” (Goldberg, 1946, p. 258). Goldberg posited that extra-curricular participation can be dangerous to students’ futures, no student should ever participate in more than one extra activity, and students should drop all non-academic activity proactively at the first sign of any academic distress (Goldberg, 1946).

The 1950s-1970s saw much growth in the promotion of extra-curricular activities through what became referred to as student development (Bloland, 1987). Student development was both a “process and a goal”, and “used developmental theory as the basis for deliberate, intentional, out-of-class educational interventions instigated by student development professionals” (Bloland, 1987, p. 292).

Since these early years, colleges and universities have instituted many different strategies for student engagement and involvement, (Hunter & Murray, 2007). Universities have created entire departments and divisions to involve students in a vast array of activities on campus. In fact, the student affairs profession evolved out of the recognition for a need for student development outside of the classroom (Hunter & Murray, 2007, p. 26). Research has shown that more students will integrate and become involved in the campus if a variety of extra-curricular activities that accommodate different student needs can be implemented (Raley, 2007, p. 3).

Many colleges and universities have hundreds of different groups of which students can be a part. Kuh et al. (2007) break down cocurricular activities into seven kinds of out-of-class activities: cultural, social, political, communication, religious, academic, and athletic (p. 8). By
providing as many different activities for students to join, colleges are casting as wide a net as possible to get as many students involved on campus as possible (Astin, 1999).

Not only does participation in cocurricular activities have a positive effect on retention for college freshmen, studies have shown that as the number of hours participating in these activities increases so does the rate of retention (Kuh, et al., 2007). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2010) conducts a yearly survey of four-year institutions to determine how students spend their time in educational activities as well as cocurricular activities. The NSSE surveys hundreds of thousands of students at hundreds of schools. Since 2000, the survey has included over 3 million students at more then 1,500 institutions (NSSE, 2010). In a study analyzing the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kuh et al. (2007) found a direct link between number of hours of cocurricular activity and persistence to the second year of college. The analyses by Kuh et al. (2007) revealed:

Being involved in cocurricular activities…had a strong positive impact on the students’ probability of returning for the second year of college. Whereas students who were involved in cocurricular activities five or fewer hours per week had a probability of returning of .88, the probability of returning was .94 for students who were involved six to 20 hours weekly; students who devoted 21 or more hours per week in such activities had a .95 probability of returning. (p. 20)

The connection between participation in cocurricular activities and retention is clear, however, why this is so is not.

**Resilience**

Resilience describes the phenomenon where positive life outcomes happen in spite of past and current risks (Masten, 2001). When a person is labeled resilient, they have adapted over
time internally and/or externally to “developmental risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities” (Masten, 1994, p. 5). Masten (2001) posits that resilience is a basic adaptation that is an inherent human trait and therefore ordinary. Resilience Theory was developed by researchers acknowledging that no matter the severity of adversity, there were always a high percentage of individuals who, “overcome adversity, who survive stress, and who rise above disadvantage” (Rutter, 1979, p. 49).

The study of resilience began in the 1970s when researchers began to notice positive adaptation among subgroups of children who were considered “at risk” for developing later psychopathology (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013, p. 15). Researchers posited that the best predictor of positive outcomes in people “lay not in the relief of their symptoms, but rather in an understanding, appreciation, and nurturance of their strengths and assets” (Goldberg & Brooks, 2013, p. vii).

Risk factors are measurable characteristics in an individual or group and/or their environment that may contribute to negative outcomes (Hartley, 2010), whereas protective factors are predictive of more positive outcomes especially in “situations of risk and adversity” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 17). Protective factors and risk factors affect resilience development and by introducing assets and/or reducing risks, resilience, even in the most severe cases, can be developed (Masten, 2001).

Research has shown that protective factors (attributes that contribute to positive outcomes) are much more predictive of positive outcomes than risk factors (attributes that contribute to negative outcomes) are predictive of negative outcomes (Bernard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1992). Over time, a shift in the literature occurred from identifying risk factors to identifying protective factors (Benard, 2004; Masten et al., 1990). The section below is a review
of the resilience theory literature highlighting its origins, seminal studies, and evolution of the construct. This review introduces the idea of academic resilience that provides the theoretical lens through which this study is viewed. Appendix A contains a list of common resilience terms as well as other terms and how they will be defined in this study.

**Early studies and evolution.** For more than forty years, researchers have been working to explain the phenomenon of success that occurs in some people in spite of risks that could “derail normative development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). This phenomenon is labeled resilience. The generally accepted definition of resilience is “positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 16). However, in an effort to broadly define the construct to allow for consistent use across disciplines and heterogeneous levels of analyses, Masten (2011) defined resilience as “The capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development” (p. 494).

It is widely accepted that there are two conditions that must be met to define the phenomenon of resilience. In their review of over forty years of resilience research, Wright et al., (2013) define these two conditions as (1) “a significant threat to the development or adaptation of the individual” and (2) “despite this threat or risk exposure, the current or eventual adaptation or adjustment of the individual or system is satisfactory” (p. 16). Once these conditions are met, the construct of resilience can fall within three groups.

Three groups of resilience phenomena widely accepted in the literature are (1) achievement of better than expected outcomes from individuals in at-risk groups, (2) positive adaptation in spite of stressful experiences or acute circumstances, and (3) positive recovery after serious trauma (Brackenreed, 2010; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 1994; Masten et al. 1990). The first type of resilience focusing on at-risk groups who achieve better than expected outcomes can
be described as “overcoming the odds” (Brackenreed, 2010, p. 114), where individuals are perceived to be invulnerable to their risk factors and develop well in spite of being from a high-risk group such ethnic minorities (Alva, 1991; Cavazos et al., 2010; Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009; Floyd, 1996; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Perez et al., 2009), having learning disabilities (Freeman et al., 2004; Miller, 2002; Orr, & Goodman, 2010), having parents who are schizophrenic (Garmezy, 1971) or having psychiatric disabilities (Hartley, 2010). Another trend in the resilience research is to study populations who have multiple concurrent risk factors such as ethnicity and low income (Finn & Rock, 1997; Taylor, 1994; Wang & Gordon, 1994).

Wang and Gordon’s (1994) book features chapters from more than fifteen resilience researchers regarding children from inner-city neighborhoods who experience multiple risk factors such as poverty and unemployment. Werner and Smith’s (1992, 2001) seminal 40-year study that followed the growth of infants born with at least four of the following risk factors: perinatal stress, chronic poverty, chronic discord, and parental psychopathology including alcoholism and mental illness.

The second type of resilience refers to competence in spite of stressful or challenging circumstances. Examples of research applying this lens include family discord or divorce (McIntyre et al., 2003) or even the stress of being a student (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Martin and Marsh (2006) claim that, “at some point all students may experience some level of poor performance, adversity, challenge, or pressure” (p. 267).

The third type of resilience refers to those who have experienced significant trauma. Masten et al. (1990) define significant trauma as an event that overwhelms one’s “coping resources” (p. 434). Examples of research following a traumatic event include post-September 11 (Bonano, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov 2006), the aftermath of a deadly campus shooting
(Hartnett & Skowronski 2010), a deadly business shooting (Powley, 2009), and war refugees (Rioli, Savicki, & Cepani, 2002).

A major reason that resilience research has become so popular is that, in spite of the different contexts in which resilience is studied (e.g. different risk factors, different age groups, different ethnicities, diverse geographic locations of research, etc.) similar results have been found (Masten & Powell, 2003; Werner, 2013; Werner & Smith, 1992). Reflecting on the results of their 32-year follow-up with the children of Kauai, as well as commenting on the results of protective factors in the lives of at-risk children in numerous other longitudinal studies, Werner and Smith (1992) posit that resilience research is a more “optimistic outlook” and that the protective factors “appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical, and historical boundaries” (p. 202).

Another reason for the popularity in resilience research is that in the past 20 years both the number of youth facing adversity and the numbers of actual adversities faced are increasing, and researchers are racing to determine if resilience theory can inform practice via interventions to help people achieve positive outcomes (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013).

Seminal researchers. One of the most cited studies, and certainly one that has had a profound impact on the study of resilience, is the ongoing work of Werner and Smith (1992, 2001). In 1955, Werner and Smith began tracking 698 children on the island of Kauai. They collected data from the last trimester of pregnancy, and at ages 1, 2, 10, 18, 32, and 40 years with a follow-up planned again at age 50 (Werner, 2013). Thirty percent of the infants were labeled as high risk for having four or more of the following risk factors: perinatal stress; chronic poverty; chronic discord, and parental psychopathology including alcoholism and mental illness (Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001). Even though one-third of the entire cohort were
at-risk, one-third of those grew into “competent, confident, and caring young adults” (Werner, 1993, p. 504; Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 192). Differences were noted between the children who adapted successfully in spite of the chronic risk factors and those who did not. From this research, three overarching types of protective factors were identified that still shape most resilience research (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013). These include: individual attributes, familial relationships, and the external environment (Waxman, et al., 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Rutter (1979) is also among the early pioneers of resilience research that inspired two decades of robust research that further developed the foundation for resilience theory (Masten, 2001). Rutter was inspired to discover why some children living under extreme stress with multiple risk factors experienced positive development while others did not. Studying ten-year-old children on the Isle of Wright and inner-city London, he focused his work on the risk factors known to be maladaptive to normal development in children. These risk factors included “severe marital discord, low social status, overcrowding or large family size, paternal criminality, maternal psychiatric disorder and admission into the care of the local authority” (Rutter, 1979, p. 51). Rutter separated the children by those who had no risk factors, those with only one, those with two, and so on. He described his results as “surprising” because for every added risk factor, the probability of risk did not double. Increasing from one risk factor to two risk factors made the probability of maladaptive development four times greater (Rutter, 1979, p. 52). Rutter (1979) found that “the combination of the stresses provided very much more than a summation of the effects of the separate stresses considered singly” (p. 53). Based on his research, Rutter (1987) also identified the four main processes that protect against adversity and risk: “1) reduction of risk impact, 2) reduction of negative chain reactions, 3) establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and 4) opening up of opportunities” (p. 316). Similar to the findings of
Werner and Smith (1992, 2001), Rutter found that protective factors play an important role in mitigating risk factors. His protective factors can also be organized by individual characteristics, family relationships, and what Rutter (1979) calls “influences outside of the home” (p. 58).

Garmezy (1971) is considered by many to be the international leader in risk and protective factor research and has inspired and conducted decades of studies (Hanson & Gottesman, 2012; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Rutter, 2012). Garmezy’s earliest work on resilience, through his Project Competence studies, is credited with positing the two criteria needed for resilience, exposure to stress and the successful adaptation despite the stress (Masten & Tellegen, 2012). His initial study was comprised of 205 children, ages 8-12 from two urban schools in Minneapolis and was both cross sectional and longitudinal with follow-ups with the children after 7, 10, and 20 years (Masten & Powell, 2003). Garmezy, like the previous researchers discussed three overarching categories of protective factors that he described as individual attributes, family qualities, and supportive systems outside the family (Masten & Powell, 2003).

The work of these early pioneers and the subsequent decades of research have produced a framework and general findings regarding resilience. Among these general findings are resilience is the positive outcome despite current or past risks (Garmezy, 1973; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001) and there is a triadic model of resilience that is the interaction of risk factors and protective factors with the individual, family, and environment (Garmezy, 1971 Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001). In the section below, a detailed review of the literature regarding protective factors will be presented.

**Protective factors.** The study of protective factors is a key to studying resilience. It is the shift from studying risk factors to protective factors that has helped to define resilience
research as a popular concept by placing an emphasis on “optimism and hope as opposed to the frustration and despair” (Kumpfer, 2002, p. 179). Furthermore, protective factors are more predictive of positive outcomes than risk factors are of predicting negative outcomes (Werner & Smith, 1992). Benard (1994) posits that risk research shows that risk factors are predictive of maladaptive outcomes in less than half of high-risk individuals whereas protective factors are predictive of positive outcomes in up to 80% of the same high-risk population (p. 8). Protective factors are also cumulative and “the more protective factors that are present in a child’s life, the more likely they are to display resilience” (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999, p. 310).

Protective factors include internal or external characteristics as well as the interaction between the two “that facilitate better outcomes in people at risk or exposed to adversity” (Masten, 1994, p. 7). Both dyadic and triadic models of models of resilience research have proliferated within the literature (see appendix B). The dyadic models study the interactions among risk and protective factors on two levels that can be summarized as internal and external (Benard, 1993, 2004; Friborg, Barlaug, Martinussen, Rsoenvinge, & Hjemdal, 2005; Masten, 2001; Novotny, 2011; Rutter, 1979). The triadic models study the interactions among risk and protective factors on three levels that can be described as individual, family, and community (Chaskin, 2008; Garmezy, 1991, 1993; Masten & Powell, 2003; McMillan and Reed, 1994; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Werner, 2013; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001). Appendix B illustrates how the triadic protective factors discussed in the seminal articles above fit within internal and external contexts and examples of how the researchers have organized and labeled internal and external characteristics.

**Internal/individual protective factors.** The research shows that there are many overlapping internal or individual factors that can foster resilience. Research has shown that
resilient persons tend to have more of these factors (Kumpfer, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1992). Similar to the contexts for building resilience, different researchers have identified different internal strengths and have labeled them differently. However, five common internal characteristics are found throughout the literature and include social competence, problem solving, autonomy, spirituality, and a sense of purpose (Benard, 2004).

*Social competence.* Social competence can be described as the attributes used to develop positive relationships (Benard, 2004). In their review of the resilience research, Howard and colleagues (1999) include abilities and behaviors needed to achieve desired social outcomes in their definition of social competence. Other researchers have described social competence as the ability to thrive in social contexts (Friborg, et al., 2005), maintain positive peer relationships (Wright, et al., 2013), a willingness to care for others (Kumpfer, 2002), and a sense of empathy towards others (Benard, 2004; Kumpfer, 2002). A major finding in the longitudinal study by Werner (1989) shows that resilient persons are able to evoke positive responses from those around them as well as able to display a “high degree of sociability” (p. 109).

*Problem solving.* The term problem solving (Benard, 2004; Kumpfer, 2002) is also described in the literature as cognitive competency (Kumpfer, 2002), intellectual skills (Masten et al., 1990), academic achievement (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 211) and initiative (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Benard (2004) sums up problem solving as “figuring things out” (p. 17) and points out that it is not only about academic learning, but also planning, resourcefulness, critical thinking, creativity, and insight. Wolin and Wolin (1993) describe problem solving as a series of life-long endeavors of exploring through trial and error, working, and generating projects that all promote self-esteem and gratification. Through the processes of problem solving, one can
achieve mastery. Mastery experiences develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and promote success in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1977).

**Autonomy.** Autonomy is a category that refers to many interrelated sub categories that include positive identity, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and humor (Benard, 2004). In layman’s terms, autonomy can be described as the ability “to march to the beat of a different drummer” and is a critical strength especially for individuals who may be in an environment of negative peer pressure (Gordon & Song, 1994, p. 36; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

**Sense of purpose.** A sense of purpose is the personal strength that describes how one describes meaning in his or her life. The paths to a sense of purpose are many and include creativity and faith (Benard, 2004). The ability to imagine a better situation is a coping skill that many high-risk children develop. For many, this imaginative process evolves into physical artistic endeavors such as writing, music making, dance, or painting (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Werner and Smith (1992) found that many of the resilient children in their study participated in hobbies that were used as an escape from troubled home experiences.

**Faith.** Faith or spirituality can be viewed as part of the sense of purpose strength (Benard, 2004) or for many resilience researchers it is discussed as its own internal strength (Kumpfer, 2002; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Gordon and Song (1994) posit that many resilient persons transcend their belief in self and belief that they can accomplish their goals to a belief system beyond self. This belief system can provide stability during times of stress and adversity, and can improve self-esteem (Benard, 2004; Gordon and Song, 1994; Masten, et al., 1990).

Faith in this context is an internal strength, as it is a belief system. Faith may be rooted in religious education, and attending church can foster faith. The positive factors associated with attending church are external strengths and will be discussed in the following section.
Resilience is fostered through the interaction of the person and their inner strengths with their environment and environmental factors (Benard, 1991; Kumpfer, 2002; Masten, 2001). The environment has both protective and risk factors that influence positive or maladaptive outcomes. There are three widely accepted broad sets of protective factors that have helped frame resilience theory and practice for many years (Benard, 2004). A review of these environmental protective factors follows below.

**Environmental protective factors.** Environmental protective factors are those that occur outside of the person and are also described as the transactional processes between a person and their environment (Kumpfer, 2002). The resilience literature has consistently shown the environment to include family, school, and community (Benard, 1991, 2004; Howard et al., 1999; Luthar et al., 2000). It is through one’s environment that the personal inner strengths are fostered and developed. Benard (1991) organized the major environmental protective factors into three domains consisting of (1) caring relationships, (2) high expectations, and (3) meaningful participation. All three of these protective factors are influential across the person’s environment of family, school, and community. Although each protective factor will be discussed separately, it is the interactional process of all three working with a person’s unique situation that will create a balance to foster resilience and positive adaptation (Benard, 2004).

**Caring relationships.** The most salient protective factor across decades of research is that of a caring relationship between an adult and young person (Masten, et al., 1990; Benard, 1994, 2004; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). The presence of a caring adult is the “most powerful protective factor in the life histories of resilient children and that although this role is usually a parent, it can be a mentor or other family member” (Benard, 2004, p. 51). This
important finding has motivated much research into roles that families, teachers, and mentors play in fostering resilience.

In her review of large-scale longitudinal resilience studies from both the United States and abroad, Werner (2013) found that across cultures and locations, a close bond with the primary caregiver, supportive grandparents, and siblings, to be the among the most influential. These multiple studies from around the globe involved thousands of people from infancy through to adulthood and the collective findings show the critical impact of a caring relationship within the family unit. The same review found teachers and mentors also among the greatest source of fostering resilience (Werner, 2013).

In their book regarding resilient survivors from troubled families, Wolin and Wolin (1993) posit that it is an innate human calling to be loved, and even young children who do not have love in their immediate environment will seek out others such as “a friend, neighbor, teacher, policeman, or minister” (p. 111) to provide a mechanism to love and to be loved. Gordon and Song (1994) posit that these others “function as models, guides, providers, and mentors” (p. 36). In fact, positive peer relationships are critical to positive outcomes (Benard, 2004). The resilience literature is filled with many examples of resilient people acknowledging another person who was significant in their path to becoming resilient. Rhodes and Lowe (2008) authored a literature review on mentoring and resilience in which they confirmed that a majority of resilient youth reported having an influential non-parent adult. Beam, Chen, and Greenberger (2002) showed that 82% of young adults in their study had a non-parental adult they could count on and who could bridge the gap of providing parental type guidance as well as being a friend. The “parental type of guidance” mentioned by Beam et al. (2002) provides a good segue to the discussion of high expectations. An imbalance between the three protective factors of caring
relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation can turn a protective factor into a risk factor. Benard (2004) argues that a caring relationship without high expectations can lead to a co-dependent relationship and iterates that the factors must work in tandem and achieve a balance.

*High expectations.* Another external protective factor that is found across the family, school, and community is high expectations. Benard (2004) defines high expectations as being clear, positive, and youth-centered (p. 45). It has been found that when parents place high expectations on children in a positive and safe way, children become “motivated to exceed those expectations” (Goldstein & Brooks, 2013, p. 134). Expectations can also come in the form of household rules that can have a profound effect on children in high-risk environments. Werner and Smith (1992) found that youth who had “structure and rules in the household” were less likely to commit juvenile offenses even when living in a high-risk environment (p. 204). Teachers too can set high expectations on students by recognizing and communicating that students are capable and that together the student and teacher can work together to find the best learning strategy for the student (Henderson, 2012). Additionally, by providing clear and consistent boundaries such as rules of behavior, students feel safer in their learning environment (Henderson, 2012). High expectations in the community take place on many levels but perhaps the cultural norms of one’s local community have the greatest impact (Benard, 2004). High expectations have the greatest potential to become a risk factor if a balance is not achieved with caring relationships. Benard (2004) describes high expectations without a caring relationship can create a “shape-up or ship-out approach” (p. 44) that will not foster resilience.

*Meaningful participation.* One of Rutter’s (1987) four mechanisms of protection against risk and adversity is the opening up of opportunities. As with the other protective factors, the
opportunity to participate is meaningful across the family, school, and community. Benard (1991) posits that the opposite of participation is alienation with alienation being identified throughout the literature as a “major risk factor for involvement in alcohol and other drugs, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school failure, and depression and suicide” (p. 15).

Familial participation can come in the form of being able to have a dialogue with caregivers about issues important to youth and it can also come in the form of helping around the house. When youth have the opportunity to discuss issues important to them, they are fostering critical thinking and self-esteem (Benard, 2004). Additionally, working around the house in the form of chores, taking care of siblings when a parent cannot, or obtaining a job to help the family are also forms of participation that help foster resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992). For schools, meaningful participation can mean seeing students as “resources rather than problems” by adopting service projects and giving students a voice in discussing ideas about the school in general and even the learning process (Henderson, 2012, p. 302). In her review, Benard (2004) identified many successful community efforts to foster participation including arts-based programs, mentoring and community service programs, and adventure programs such as ropes courses as all being successful mechanisms for fostering resilience.

**Conclusion.** Resilience is the successful, dynamic interaction between one’s internal characteristics and external environment. The opposite also holds true; vulnerability is the unsuccessful dynamic interaction between one’s internal characteristics and external environment. It is the positive strengths approach that differentiates the study of resilience from that of the study of vulnerability and risk. The objective of resilience research is to identify the protective factors that “nurture the development of adaptive systems” and seek out how these systems can be nurtured and protected (Masten, 2001). For an individual to be considered
resilient there must be a present or past threat to normative development, protective factors must
interact with the individual, and there must be some criterion to measure for successful
adaptation (Masten & Reed, 2002). Appendix C shows the sets of risk factors, protective factors,
and adaptation criteria for many of the studies presented in this review.

**Academic Resilience.** When investigating resilience as a construct it is important to
identify the specific context in which it is being studied (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). With
the popularity of research on resilience, researchers began to specify what type of resilience they
were studying by using adjectives to describe their work (Novotny, 2011). The early 1990s
marked the beginning of specific research on academic resilience. The past twenty years there
has been surge in popularity in this phenomenon.

A search for articles with the terms “academic resilience” and “educational resilience” on
the academic aggregator EBSCOHost reveals no articles prior to 1991 with close to 70% of all
“academic” and “educational” resilience articles uncovered in this search published in the past
decade. A similar search using Google Scholar reveals more than 400,000 articles on the subject
with 73% written in the past decade. This shows the growing interest for studying the resilience
construct in the context of education.

Educational resilience can be described as successfully overcoming threats to educational
development (Wang et al., 1994). Alva (1991) describes educationally resilient students as those
who “sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of
stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and, ultimately,
dropping out of school” (p. 46). Martin and March (2006) broaden the definition to include all
students, due to the stresses endemic to the educational process that all students will experience
at some point in their academic career.
Similar to early resilience research, educational resilience researchers explore the interaction of risk factors, protective factors, and the criteria used to measure whether or not positive adaptive outcomes have occurred (resilience). What follows highlights the risk factors and criteria that are more common in educational resilience research.

Much of the research on educational resilience in the United States has focused on ethnic minority groups including Hispanics/Latinos (Alva, 1991; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Lodmer, 2008; Morales, 2008; Perez et al., 2009; Reyes & Jason, 1993; Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997), Native Americans (Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009; Finn & Rock, 1997), and African Americans (Finn & Rock, 1997; Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991). These groups are at risk due to acculturation issues, attempting to find a place in two cultures (Gonzales & Padilla, 1997), or a history of oppression (Lee, Winfield & Wilson, 1991). Another risk factor that deserves attention is low socioeconomic status (SES).

Socioeconomic status and its relation with academic achievement may be the most used context in all education research (Sirin, 2005). In Sirin’s (2005) meta-analysis of the literature on socioeconomic status and academic research he identified three commonly accepted components of SES that include “parental income, parental education, and parental occupation” (p. 418) and mentions home resources such as access to books, computers, and after school/summer services as gaining popularity as a fourth indicator. It is therefore not surprising that many researchers who study educational research also use this contextual variable in their research (Alva, 1991; Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009; Finn, & Rock, 1997; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Lodmer, 2008; McMillan & Reed, 1993; Morales, 2008; Nota, Soresi, & Zimmerman, 2004).
Two of these components, low income and being a first-generation student (parental education), have shaped much of the literature on college persistence (Cofers & Sanders, 1998; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ishitani, 2003; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Novotny, 2011; Paulson & St. John, 2002). Engle and Tinto (2008) posit that “the combined impact of these two characteristics put students who are both low-income and the first in their families to go to college at the greatest risk of failure in postsecondary education” (p. 6) and refer to these students as the “doubly-disadvantaged population” (p. 6).

Many different programs such as the federal TRIO programs define low-income students as those whose family income did not exceed 150 percent of the federally established poverty level for their family size the preceding year (Higher Education Act of 1965). According to Choy (2000) these criteria to establish low-income status has a few advantages that include the students’ income is compared to the entire population not just other college students, family size is accounted for, and the levels are adjusted yearly by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The Federal Government defines first-generation college students (FGCS) as those students who neither parent has obtained a baccalaureate degree or in the case of a student who was raised by only on parent, if that parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act of 1965). According to Longwell-Grice (2007), FGCS have all the same anxieties of other college students; however, compared to their peers, they receive less help in preparing for college, feel less supported by family for attending college and feel less connected to the college they attend (p. 407). According to the National Center for Education Statistics first-generation college students have lower GPAs and are more likely to withdraw from or need to repeat a course than their non-first generation peers (Chen & Carrol, 2005). First generation
students also graduate at one-third the rate of non-low income students (Schreiner, Noel & Cantwell, 2011).

Certain criteria must be identified to ascertain whether a college student who is at-risk of dropping out has fostered resilience. The main criteria in the literature include persistence from freshman to sophomore year and academic achievement (Bulger & Watson, 2006; Chen, 2012; Herzog, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Most students who drop out of college do so prior to their second year (Chen, 2012). Data presented by the ACT shows that almost one-third of college students drop out prior to their second year of college (ACT, 2012). Therefore, first year at-risk college students who persist to their second year of college have shown evidence of fostering resilience.

Academic achievement is measured by grade point average (Finn, & Rock, 1997; Morales, 2008; Perez et al., 2009). Morales (2008) defines academic resilience as “exceptional academic achievement” and uses a minimum 3.0 GPA to measure academic achievement. Additionally, many states’ student aid programs have shifted from need-based to merit based with minimum grade point averages required for both eligibility and renewal (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2012; Ness, 2010). Therefore, first year at-risk college students who obtain a 3.0 cumulative first year GPA have shown evidence of fostering resilience.

Involvement in cocurricular activities has been identified as a protective factor for college freshman in terms of them persisting to their second year of college (Kuh, et al. 2007). However, no study known to date has explored the mechanisms of cocurricular participation in relation to fostering resilience in at-risk first year college students. What follows next is a review of the literature regarding cocurricular activities and resilience.

**Cocurricular activities and resilience.** Connecting resilience and cocurricular activities is not new. Participation in cocurricular activities played a key role in the development of
resilient youth in the longitudinal study by Werner and Smith (1992). The authors mentioned cooperative activities that were led by an adult as being the most effective. These observations made by the researchers in this study took place prior to 1973. Many contemporary studies on resilience have also found a link between cocurricular participation and resilience (Benard, 2004; Freeman et al., 2004; Feinstein et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Perez et al., 2009; McMillan & Reed, 1993). These studies have found that participation in cocurricular activities can be a mechanism to foster resilience across both the internal strengths and environmental factors. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) posit that cocurricular activities may foster talent that in turn can contribute to internal strengths of “competence, efficacy, esteem, and well being” (p. 212). Other researchers have declared that participation in cocurricular activities is advantageous for fostering resilience because the environmental protective factors of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation can work across all three contexts of family, school, and community (Gardner et al., 2012; Henderson, 2012).

**Caring relationships.** A common protective factor developed through participation in cocurricular activities is that of caring relationships. Researchers have revealed many positive outcomes of cocurricular participation including the development of relationships with peers and adults alike (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2010; Gardner et al., 2012; Mahoney et al., 2003; Perez et al., 2009). Henderson (2012) posits that the “social connections” created for many students through their participation in cocurricular activities are the primary motivation for going to school (p. 302). In many schools the opportunity for long-term relationships with an adult is thwarted due to changing schedules and teachers on a regular basis. An advantage of many cocurricular activities is the development of long term mentoring relationships with non-familial adults such as coaches or arts teachers, who have contact with the
student regularly and potentially for years (Eccles, et al., 2003; Kostel, 1993; Peck, Roeser, 
Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008) and who serve as “teachers, mentors, friends, gate keepers, and problem 
solvers (Eccles, et al., 2003, p. 881).

High expectations. With participation in a cocurricular activity comes expectations for 
participation (Peck, et al. 2008). In her review, Benard (2004) cites rules and structure as the 
“critical foundation” (p. 99) for creating high expectations. Coaches and teachers of cocurricular 
activities have an advantage over their regular teacher colleagues in that these activities are not 
required, yet desired by students who want to participate in the activity because they are 
interested in and enjoy the activity and therefore expectations for participation can be set higher 
(Mahoney et al., 2003). Additionally, many states have passed “no pass no play” rules that 
govern participation for most cocurricular activities including sports and music. Proponents of 
“no pass no play” rules argue that these academic expectations for participation serve as 
motivation and incentive to achieve academic expectations and that since many students are 
passionate about their cocurricular activities it makes sense to use higher expectations to 
motivate their educational achievements (Burnett, 2001).

Meaningful participation. Cocurricular activities can offer a meaningful participation 
experience in different ways. Playing on a sports team or performing with a music ensemble can 
create avenues for meaningful participation through the process of developing the skills 
necessary for the activity. Mahoney and colleagues (2003) describe the skill acquisition process 
as one where goals are determined, rehearsal strategies are implemented to reach set goals, and 
then the strategies are executed in performance, and as skills increase so to do the goals and the 
process continues (p. 410). This cycle leads to repeated successes that act as protective factors, 
promote self-efficacy, and are transferable to other life experiences (Bandura, 1977).
Summary

This review of the literature has shown that a college degree is more valuable today than it has been in the past and that its value will only increase over time (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). Additionally, a college degree offers protection from unemployment and contributes greatly to personal economic stability (Carnevale et al., 2010). The literature has also shown that college attrition is great, especially between the first and second year of college and it affects at-risk students four times more than non-at-risk students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Two seminal approaches have been popular in theory and practice for many years to help identify the causes and cures for this chronic issue including Astin’s (1984, 1985, 1999) theory of involvement and Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory (1975, 1991, 2001, 2005). A new approach to the issue of persistence and retention may be found in resilience theory.

Resilience theory is a promising vehicle to address the retention issue. Originally researched in the context of dire conditions of young children (Garmezy, 1973; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001), the construct has evolved to now include academic resilience (Alva, 1991; Martin, 2006). The literature shows that resilience-promoting factors would benefit all students as “academic resilience is relevant to all students because at some point all students may experience some level of poor performance, adversity, challenge, or pressure” (Martin & Marsh, 2006, p. 267). Resilience includes both internal strengths and external environmental factors that interact in a dynamic process to mitigate acute or chronic adversities and risks. The protective factors that work across the external protective factors include caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation (Bernard, 1991; 2004).

The literature is clear that cocurricular participation can foster resilience across all three environmental protective factors of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful
participation (Benard, 2004). The literature also shows that cocurricular activities have a measurable and profound effect on college persistence (Kuh, et al., 2007). There is also evidence to support that the more participation in cocurricular activities the greater the protective factors (Gardner et al., 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience.
Chapter 3 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods and design of this research. This will include the chosen methodology; research design; research tradition; participants in the study, how the participants were recruited, access to the research site and participants; data collection, storage, and analysis; trustworthiness and validity of the research; and ethical considerations in dealing with human subjects as well obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience. The overarching research question guiding this study was: *How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience?* And the theory driven question was: *To what extent does their experience in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities work as a mechanism to foster resilience?*

Research Design

This research was rooted in the qualitative research tradition. The choice of qualitative design allowed for the researcher to more adequately report how participants described their experiences (Creswell, 2013). In describing academic resilience studies, Martin and Marsh (2009) argue that a qualitative approach “offers the opportunity for powerful and authentic insights into the lived experience of students’ academic resilience” (p. 364). Masten (2001) warns that a quantitative design “can fail to capture striking patterns in the lives of real people” (p. 229).

Ungar (2003) presents five specific reasons as to why a qualitative approach to resilience research is advantageous over a quantitative approach. Qualitative methods, (1) identify
protective processes that are significant to the experiences of participants; (2) provide a rich narrative of phenomenon in a specific context; (3) expose paths to positive outcomes not previously appreciated; (4) avoid generalization and foster transferability; and, (5) account for researcher bias (p. 86).

**Research Tradition**

This qualitative study was guided by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), specifically by the work of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a form of qualitative research that explores how individuals make sense of life experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) describe the key feature of interpretive phenomenological analysis as a “focus on personal meaning and sense-making in a particular context for people who share a particular experience” (p. 45). In this research, the purpose was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a four-year public colleges and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities described their college experience. Being at-risk was the shared background for the participants and making sense of their participation in cocurricular activities was the shared experience.

IPA is a good fit for resilience research as both focus on positive assets rather than risk factors. Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) argue that there is “scope for IPA research to become less disease and deficit focused, and for participants to be given a chance to express their views about strength, wellness, and quality of life” (p. 21). Resilience research too is steeped in a positive assets tradition where the theory is that enough protective factors can off-set the most extreme stress and multiple risk factors and produce better than expected life outcomes (Masten, 2001). IPA has its roots in psychology and evolved from “three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography” (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 11).
Phenomenology. Phenomenology can be described as the study of experience, in particular, “what the experience of being human is like” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Phenomenology requires one to step out of one’s experiences and reflect on their meaning. This makes the taken-for-granted subjective experiences more objective, and these objective experiences become phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological studies emphasize a particular phenomenon to be explored by multiple persons in order to understand the shared phenomenon better (Creswell, 2013).

Although the term phenomenology dates to the eighteenth century where it appeared in philosophy texts by Lambert, Herder, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel; Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the central figure in the development of phenomenology as a philosophical movement (Moran, 2001). Husserl argued that, “the task of phenomenology is to return to taken for granted experiences and to reexamine them in an intentional manner that brings to light the essence (meaning) of human experience” (Fochtman, 2008, p. 186). This could be achieved by what Husserl called bracketing, where the taken for granted is separated “in order to concentrate on our perception of that world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 13). One of Husserl’s students, Heidegger further developed phenomenology into a branch now recognized as hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and was introduced by Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger is an important figure in both phenomenology and hermeneutics and is credited with transforming phenomenology into hermeneutical phenomenology (Moran, 2001). Heidegger’s seminal work was titled Being and Time (1927) and his subject is Dasein, which literally means there-being (Smith et al., 2009). Dasein can be described as “a being who has an understanding of being” and “that understanding comes from
the interpretation of being hence hermeneutism is the study of understanding” (Blore, 2012, p. 104).

A key component of hermeneutic theory is the hermeneutic cycle, which is an iterative process between the part and the whole (Smith et al., 2009). The whole cannot be understood without understanding the parts and the parts cannot be understood without understanding the whole, thus the term hermeneutic circle describes this iterative process. Another main pillar of IPA research is the double hermeneutic, which is described as the researcher trying to interpret and make sense of how the participants make sense of their world (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014).

Idiography. The third influence on the development of IPA is idiography. In contrast to a nomothetic approach where data are collected in a manner that prohibits individual analysis, idiography focuses on the individual (Smith et al., 2009). Idiography has two distinct levels that include a detailed examination of a particular phenomenon and how that phenomenon is experienced by a single person (Eatough & Smith, 2006). Smith et al. (2009) argue that by committing to the particular, or single case, a level of detail and depth can be achieved in the analysis. This process can then move from the single case analysis to more general claims (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29).

Positionality Statement

Phenomenological analysis is interpretative and the researcher brings prior experiences and assumptions to the analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). Although bracketing was employed in this study, it is difficult to bracket out all of one’s previous experiences and biases. Shaw (2010) argues that the researcher’s presuppositions “can both hinder and enhance the interpretation of another’s lived experience” (p. 235).
My perspective on the role that cocurricular activities can play in fostering persistence is both personal and professional. I attended high school in the early 1980s. Academic expectations were very low, and therefore my level of achievement suffered. Students like myself who did not have academic support or encouragement at home did not excel academically in contrast to students from homes with more resources and higher expectations.

Although I did not have academic support at home, I was not a low-income or first generation college student. I never had to worry about food or shelter. I grew up with two college-educated parents and even though I was not an academically successful student, there was never any question whether I would attend college or not. It was never discussed in my family; it was just an expected step to attend college after high school. Additionally, I had many options as to where I could attend college. Although I needed the scholarships that music afforded me, tuition was very low when I attended school and I was never truly at-risk of dropping out of school due to finances. Additionally, being a white student, I was unaware of any challenges students of other ethnicities may have faced.

Cocurricular activities kept me in school and paved the way for me to go to college on a scholarship where the academic expectations were much higher. At college, I needed to become a better student or risk losing my scholarship. I would not have attended college had I not received a music scholarship. Cocurricular participation had a profound effect on me allowing me to attend college and become a productive citizen.

Specifically, I can now look and back identify the most important factors that kept me in school as they align with my current research in resilience. Involvement in the music program provided the three environmental protective factors that led to my successful college experience. Having a private teacher that I met with every week on a one-to-one basis throughout my entire
college career gave me a connection and provided a long term caring relationship. The high expectations set for me of preparing many public performances were also a protective factor that greatly influenced me. And the third protective factor of meaningful participation was experienced through many performances as well as rehearsals.

Professionally, from 2000-2010, I was the director of a large, campus-wide music program at a major private university in the Northeast. Our program provided all of the music-making opportunities for non-music majors campus-wide. Our program championed the effects of cocurricular participation for college students. I spent a great deal of time speaking at student orientations and meeting with students and parents discussing the benefits of cocurricular activities. This perspective was very unique in that I was able to see the positive effects of cocurricular activities every day.

Participants

Smith et al. (2009) state that an IPA study must use a purposive homogenous sample for the research. By making the participants as “uniform as possible” a detailed examination of “convergence and divergence” within the sample will yield “variability within the group” (Smith et al., p. 51). For this study all participants were English-speaking, traditional college sophomores, juniors, or seniors who self identified as being at-risk (low-income and first-generation college student), self identified as participating in staff- or faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities for more than six hours per week during their freshman and current year, persisted to their second year at the same institution where they matriculated, and had a minimum cumulative 3.0 grade point average. Additionally, maximal variation sampling was employed. Although the participants in the study shared many common attributes, it was important to identify a diverse set of participants who could share their experiences within the
boundaries set up by the purposive homogeneous sampling. Therefore, males and females, as well as participants of different races were sought for participation in this study. This variation allows for different perspectives, which is an “ideal” in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Smith et al. (2009) suggest a sample size between three and six for IPA research. They further suggest that the number of interviews for a doctoral thesis be kept between four and ten, this is the number of interviews, not the number of participants, and allows for second interviews of participants if needed. However, in a post on the IPA list serve in the summer of 2015, Smith (2015) updated these suggestions with his “very rough rule of thumb” and indicated that studies should include between six and ten participants. This current study was well underway at the time of this correspondence with an original plan of five participants. Based on the most recent recommendation by Smith (2015) this research made use of a sample size of seven.

**Recruitment and Access**

Recruitment of participants took place after the Northeastern Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval. The researcher approached the IRB at the college where the research was to be conducted, presenting the approved IRB paperwork from Northeastern’s IRB, in order to gain access to the campus for the research. Once approved by the site’s IRB, three strategies for recruiting participants were employed. The first was that an email of introduction was sent to the traditional gatekeepers of arts-based cocurricular performing arts activities on campus including band directors, orchestra directors, choral directors, theater professors, and dance professors. Included in this email was the call for participants (see Appendix D for call for participants) with a request that the call for participants be posted as well as sent to any students who the faculty felt fit the criteria. This strategy was employed to ensure that the performing arts population was contacted. The second strategy was to contact the office on the campus that
serves first-generation and low-income students and request that the call for participants (see Appendix D for call for participants) be sent via email to all students who fit the criteria for participation. This strategy was employed to ensure that the first generation and low-income students were contacted. The call for participants directed those who met the criteria and who were interested in being interviewed to a web form where they were directed fill out preliminary information for this research (see Appendix E for web form). Participants were informed of the nature of the research, their rights as participants, as well as all of the requirements for participation in the study. Additionally they were asked to confirm that they are both low-income and first-generation, how much time they spend per week in cocurricular activities, which cocurricular activities they participate in, and their cumulative grade point average. The third strategy employed snowball sampling. After a response from the call for participants was answered by one person who fit all of the necessary criteria, that participant was asked if they knew of anyone else who fit the criteria who may be interested. The first participant was asked to invite other potential participants to fill out the same web from.

Those selected to participate received a phone call from the researcher and a time for the first interview was arranged. During the phone call, participants were informed of the benefits of the study which could include: validation of the effects of cocurricular activities in building resilience in at-risk college freshman; a deeper understanding of how cocurricular participation acts as a mechanism to build resilience that could lead to retention from the first to second year of college; findings that could possibly aid student affairs personnel to identify at-risk students and find a meaningful cocurricular activity for the student; and that colleges may continue or increase funding for cocurricular activities.
Data Collection

The primary form of data for this research was in-depth semi-structured interviews. Smith et al. (2009) state that in-depth interviews are the optimum vehicle for collecting data for IPA research. Participants need the opportunity to “tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas” (Smith et al. 2009, p. 56). This approach yielded a rich and detailed first person account of the participants’ experiences. The interview protocol for this research can be found in appendix F.

The overarching research question guiding this research was not asked directly to the participants. Smith et al. (2009) posit that the research question guiding the study will be answered in the analysis stage. Asking the research question to the participant will not be effective and the interviews should approach the interview question “sideways” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58).

The success of the interview is critical to the analysis stage (Smith et al., 2009). Although Smith et al. (2009) provide much guidance for the novice researcher and suggest that one interview is sufficient. To ensure a rich and descriptive account from the participants, two interviews were scheduled. The interview schedule for this research can be found in Appendix F.

All interviews took place face to face. The in-person interviews were conducted in a private meeting room on the campus of the student. Smith et al., (2009) suggest that the participant has a say regarding the location of the interview to help them feel more comfortable.

The first semi-structured interviews were scheduled to last no more than 90 minutes. Seidman (2013) suggests 90 minutes as being the sweet spot between 60 minutes, that he feels is too short and can leave the participant “watching the clock,” and two hours, that he feels is too
long “to sit at one time” (p. 24). The work of Smith et al. (2009) guided the structure of the questions and follow-up questions. Interviews were audio recorded on two devices (one primary and one for back up). Interviewees’ names were not used in any way to identify audio files. Furthermore, all physical documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home, and all computer files were encrypted.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used for individuals and institutions. Pseudonyms were used not only in the reporting of the findings but on all materials related to each participant (notes, files, recordings, etc.). No one other than the researcher will have access to any of the collected data. Furthermore, all data will be destroyed five years after the research has been completed.

**Data Storage**

Each interview was audio recorded on the researcher’s iPhone and iPad. Both of these devices were password protected. The recordings were uploaded to the researcher’s online encrypted storage account and one copy was downloaded as a back up onto a USB flash drive that is stored in a lockbox in the researcher’s home. All files were encrypted and password protected. Once these two steps were accomplished, all files on the iPhone and iPad were deleted.

Transcripts and other digital documents were stored in the same manner as the audio files. All digital documents were stored on the password and encrypted online storage account with one copy saved as a back up on a USB flash drive and placed in a lockbox in the researcher’s home.

At the conclusion of the study, all digital information stored on the online password protected and encrypted online storage account will be deleted. The data on the USB flash drive
and stored in a lockbox will remain untouched for a period of five years and then will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis was framed by Smith et al. (2009) interpretive phenomenological analysis. Smith et al. (2009) present a set of six steps to guide the researcher through the analysis process. These steps include reading and re-reading of the text, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connection across emergent themes, moving to the next case, and looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

This study made use of MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to help familiarize, organize, label, note, code, and analyze the data. It is recommended that doctoral researchers use CAQDAS in the earliest stages of analysis to ensure that the data is “safely stored, categorized, and easily retrievable” and that due to the steep learning curve of CAQDAS the sooner the researcher begins using the CAQDAS, the sooner the researcher will become “comfortable and confident” with the software (Seidman, 2013, p. 133). Both of these recommendations were heeded in this study.

Smith et al. (2009) suggest analyzing the interview that yielded the most in-depth and engaging information first. In keeping in-line with “IPA’s idiographic commitment” the first interview was analyzed in great detail before beginning anew with the subsequent transcripts (Smith et al. 2009, p. 82).

The first step taken in the analysis was a reading and re-reading the text (Smith et al., 2009). The reading and re-reading of the text allows the researcher to not only become more familiar with the text but promotes better analysis by forcing the researcher to slow down and break the habit of “quick and dirty reduction and synopsis” (Smith et al. 2009). As the
researcher becomes more familiar with the text, step one segues into step two and the researcher begins initial noting. Although initial noting is “very exploratory” and “ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript”, Smith et al. (2009) do offer guidance and structure to this step by suggesting that these initial notes be organized by descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments (p. 83).

Step three is the process of developing emergent themes (Smith et al. 2009). These emergent themes will break up the narrative flow of the text into many smaller main themes. Smith et al. (2009) describe this as one part of the hermeneutic cycle where the whole interview becomes reduced to main parts and then put back together again in the analysis. These themes are a combination of the participant’s original words and also the researcher’s interpretation, reflecting the double hermeneutic indicative of proper IPA research (Smith et al. 2009).

The fourth step is the search for connections across emergent themes (Smith et al. 2009). At this point of the analysis the emergent themes are identified in the order that they appear in the transcript. During the fourth step similar themes are grouped together and are nested under super-ordinate themes.

The fifth step is to repeat steps one through four for the each of the next transcripts. Smith et al. (2009) caution that each case needs to be analyzed individually to allow for new themes to emerge in subsequent analyses (Smith et al. 2009). After each case is analyzed, Smith et al. (2009) state the need for analysis across the cases to find common themes. During this sixth step, themes across each case will be grouped into similar cross-case themes. As more cycles of analysis occur, larger themes will emerge across cases. Ultimately the individual themes and super-ordinate themes will end up as supporting material for the few large themes that will be presented in the findings. To ensure congruence between the methodology and
analysis, care will be taken to ensure that the notes, categories, and major themes all describe the lived experience of the participants.

**Trustworthiness**

The nature of this qualitative IPA research was to explore how resilience is fostered through participation in cocurricular activities in at-risk college students. Creswell (2013) outlines eight validation strategies to ensure trustworthiness, quality, and validity, in qualitative research and recommends that researchers use at least two. Additionally, Smith et al. (2009) also give suggestions to assess validity in IPA research. Three different strategies were employed in this research to ensure validity. Strategies used in this research include: the use of rich, thick description, member checking, and memoing,

Creswell (2013) posits that the use of rich and thick descriptions makes it more probable that information is transferable to other settings. Writing with great detail and the use of quotes are two strategies to ensure a rich, thick description. Using many verbatim quotes from the participants also gives the participants a voice and allows the reader to check the interpretations made by the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

Member checking is another validation strategy employed in this research. In member checking, after the interviews with the participants have been transcribed, the transcripts were shared with each participant (separately) to confirm the accuracy of their “voice”. Each participant had one week to review the information and assess the accuracy of the transcript and to provide any feedback. This member checking strategy is considered to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

The use of memos is another validation strategy that was employed in this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the use of memos as “one of the most useful and powerful sense-
making tools at hand” (p. 72). Memos are notes that the researcher writes to oneself throughout the entire process regarding data and categories (Creswell, 2012). The use of memos allows the researcher to notate thoughts and feelings about the study, may navigate the investigation towards new directions, and help identify which data to develop further (Creswell, 2012). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that memoing should occur during all phases of the research (from the first transcript through the final report), and should always take priority.

Two types of memos were used during this research and included MAXQDA, the software used in analysis, as well as a hand written journal. MAXQDA was used during analysis stages where the researcher found himself deeply engaged in MAXQDA and made use of the memo feature within the software for specific notes on anything that was currently being worked on. The handwritten journal was used for thoughts that occurred during every stage of the analysis that were not germane to the current task. Anytime a seemingly random thought occurred, it was written down very quickly in the journal so that focus could be returned to the task at hand. The handwritten journal proved very useful throughout the entire process in two ways. First, by immediately writing down any thoughts, the researcher was able to return to the task at hand without being distracted away from the current task for too long or perhaps losing focus. Secondly, upon reviewing these notes later, many of these seemingly random thoughts turned into great topics that helped shape the entire analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The nature of this research was to study how resilience is fostered through participation in cocurricular activities in at-risk college students. All participants were English speaking traditional college sophomores, juniors, or seniors, that self-identified as being at-risk and as having participated in cocurricular activities for more than six hours per week during their
fresman year. No participants from vulnerable populations as defined by the National Institute of Health (2008) were used in this study.

Multiple steps were taken to protect the human subjects in this study. First, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, Butin (2010), suggests using pseudonyms for individuals and institutions (p. 106). Pseudonyms were used not only in the reporting of the findings but on all materials related to each participant (notes, files, recordings, etc.). During the actual recording of the interviews, neither the participant’s name or any other personal identifying questions were used. Furthermore, any physical documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home, and all computer files will be encrypted.

In accordance with the National Institute of Health regulations, each participant verbally agreed to the informed consent form informing them of the purpose of the study, any foreseeable risks, the benefits of the study, steps taken to ensure their confidentiality, any compensation they will receive as participants, the researcher’s contact information should they have any questions during the process, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (NIH, 2008).

Interviews took place in person and were conducted in a private meeting room on the campus of the student. Additionally, all proper applications and paperwork were filled out in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University in accordance with the use of human participants in research and the policies and procedures for Human Subject Research Protection. Data collection only began after approval was granted.
Chapter 4 Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience. The overarching research question guiding this study was: *How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience?* Smith et al. (2009) are clear that the process of analysis begins with a single case and only after an in-depth analysis is made should the researcher move on to the next case. Therefore, the results of this study will be presented case by case and then a cross-case analysis with the superordinate themes that emerged presented.

The lived experience is the “primary concern” of IPA and using many verbatim quotes from the participants gives the participants a voice and allows the reader to check the interpretations made by the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) advise that a “large proportion” of the results and analysis be direct extracts from the transcripts (p. 109). Creswell (2013) posits that the use of rich and thick descriptions makes it more probable that information is transferable to other settings. Writing with great detail and the use of quotes are two strategies to ensure a rich, thick description. For these reasons, both the individual narratives and the cross case analysis make great use of quotes from the participants.

**Participants**

A total of seven participants were interviewed for this research. They were from three different universities in three different states. All three schools were four-year public state universities. The first school provided three participants. The school was a very large public four-year college and was the flagship state school. The second and third schools were also large
public four-year colleges and were located in the southwest United States; each one provided two participants.

All participants were English-speaking traditional college sophomores, juniors, or seniors who self-identified as being at-risk (low-income and first-generation college student); self-identified as participating in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities for more than six hours per week during their freshman and subsequent years; have persisted beyond their freshman year; and had a cumulative 3.0 grade point average or higher. Although the participants in the study shared many common attributes, to ensure maximum variability it was important to identify a diverse set of participants within the boundaries set up by the purposive homogeneous sampling. Recruiting both males and females as well as involving participants of different ethnicities achieved this. There were four females and three males. The participants identified themselves as white (3), Hispanic (2) African-American (1), and Asian (1). See Table 1 for a detailed overview.
Table 1
Overview of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time spent in activity per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>PreMed: Kinesiology</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Theater</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Biological Science</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>30-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Geological Physics</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>30-32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Jorge.** Jorge was a senior engineering student at a large (>20,000 students) public four-year university in the southwest United States. He grew up in a very small town about 30 minutes outside of the city where his college is located. He was the only child to two Mexican immigrants who did not complete high school. His father washed cars for a living and his mother worked in the cafeteria in the high school Jorge attended. Jorge described the community he grew up in and schools he attended as follows:

I like my little high school, my little town. We all knew each other. We would go to church and our whole town was there. It’s a really nice community and you never have to worry about crime or any of that. [My] high school is a really small school. Really, we, again, just like the community, we all knew each other there. Whether you were a sophomore or a senior, you knew who they were and they knew who you were. It was a
very unified school, really nice. Again, there was no problems there whatsoever, so very comfortable.

Jorge grew up living in “a little mobile home trailer. It wasn’t even the normal size mobile homes. It was those even smaller ones. It looked like a little RV, really.”

Jorge’s father was the greatest influence on his decision to attend college. He shared that in middle school, his father would often tell him, “Nobody grows up thinking, I want to wash cars for a living. Do you know what you want to do? Do you know what you want to do with your life?” Jorge indicated that at the time he was just being a normal middle school student, but the constant reminder got him thinking about different careers at a young age, “Little by little, I started getting a grasp of what each career was and what it meant.”

His father also instilled in him the importance of being passionate about whatever career choice he made. Reflecting on what his dad would tell him, Jorge shared the following:

It doesn’t matter what you pick, what you want to do with yourself, with your life, what you want to do for your career, but make sure that whatever you pick is what you would like to do. Even if that means that you want to be a janitor and that’s what you love, that’s what you’re passionate about, you be the best janitor there is. You go work your butt and you make sure you wake up every morning and say, yes, another day at work, because I love what I’m doing, so much that it’s not even considered a job. Something you like to do and you’re getting paid for it.

His family’s finances were the determining factor of where Jorge ended up attending college and being the first in his family on track to graduate from college creates pressure for Jorge. He did not want to let his family down, and he also wanted to be able to take care of them
once he graduated. He also shared that much of the pressure he feels is due to his family not understanding what it is like to be a college student.

Jorge has participated in instrumental music since the fifth grade. He played the clarinet and made the all-state band as both a junior and senior in high school. His success in band as well as his academic success made picking a college major for him very difficult. “My senior year, I was pulling my hairs off, trying to decide if I wanted to major in music or engineering.” Jorge shared that although he picked engineering, his passion for band was too great for him to not continue with the activity while in college:

I just felt like I couldn’t leave band. I just couldn’t. It had been a part of my life for so long, I just couldn’t let it go. The stuff I went through, especially through high school, even the band trips, State [festival] it was such a great experience meeting new people everywhere and being able to talk to each other about band stuff, typical band geeks, but you are going to appreciate that so much that I just really couldn’t let go of that life, because I enjoyed it so much. Until today, I am still here.

**Jorge’s college experience.** Jorge indicated that he spends between twelve and twenty hours per week in band activities. He was a member of the marching band as well as a concert band. The marching band took up the bulk of the time. He indicated that on football game days he spent more than 16 hours on campus. In addition to the hours of rehearsal required for membership in the bands, Jorge practiced outside of rehearsals to prepare for them.

He shared one of his earliest experiences of being in a college marching band and the profound affect it had on him. It occurred just prior to his freshman year at band camp. Band camp was held for two weeks prior to the beginning of classes. The band rehearsed all day to
learn music and drill for the upcoming football season. It was also a time for new members to learn the culture of the band program and to meet the others members in the band.

My [high school] band consisted of about forty band members. It was a really small band and we weren’t all that great. We struggled through our band program. We weren’t such a great ensemble. Then I remember that first semester in college. There is two hundred plus band members, and I am like, “Why is there so many people here? I don’t get it. Why is it ten times my band size?” I remember we would be practicing in sections, rehearsing in sections, and then at the end, [the band director] was like, “Everybody, bring it in. Everybody, the fight song.” He counted us off and as soon as everybody started playing, I got this huge smile on my face and it was so huge that I couldn’t play, because the sound and the good sounds, and just how loud, how big and how powerful our sound was, I am like, “This is band? Because it’s nothing like in high school.” It was so surreal and it was such a great experience. At that moment, I am telling you, I couldn’t play because I was so amazed by the sounds.

Being a part of such a large ensemble, Jorge made many friends. He indicated that he spent most of his time outside of classes and rehearsals with other band members.

In addition to being a member of the band program, Jorge was also a student leader. He was a section leader as well as a captain in the band. As section leader, Jorge was responsible for the other twenty-two members in his section. He helped them with their music and ensured that they all understood key information such as rehearsal times and schedules. He described the higher expectations placed on him as a section leader as, “I am their leader, I am supposed to teach them. If I can’t do it, how in the world am I going to be able to teach them?” As a captain
in the band, Jorge was responsible for the other section leaders as well. So not only was he a leader for his section, he was the leader of the other leaders.

I would be on top of them, making sure that they were doing their work. It is part of that leadership ladder, taking care of each other down the ladder. There was always expectations to make sure I was on top of things all the time.

Jorge believed that his leadership experience was critical to his college success and his future success in the workplace.

I think band prepares you so much. Not even in engineering do they prepare you that well. When do they tell you how to do that kind of stuff? Here, it’s literally hands-on on how to do that. I think it connects very well.

Jorge shared that the most significant experience of his college career was a marching band show out of town where his college band performed at the end of the state high school marching band contest. The college band performed at the end of the competition while the judges tallied up the scores from the day-long show. The college band was able to perform in front of a full stadium of high school marching band members.

We perform our show and everything. We ended with Firebird. I just remember ending the show. We were there, we are breathing hard. You can barely breathe and the adrenaline is going through you, you just finished the show. I remember looking up at the press box and there is this guy in the press box just putting his hands up and yelling. I am pretty sure he was yelling, but he was going crazy out there. We got a standing ovation by every single person who was there. It was surreal. It was such a great performance and I always go back to YouTube and I always go Google it. I just want to listen to it and hear it, because I thought it was such a great performance. Everybody
cheered and cheered, and they wouldn’t stop. They didn’t stop cheering until we left the stadium. I don’t know, it was such a great moment that I lived and I know it’s something I am never going to forget.

At the time of the interview, Jorge was working concurrently on finishing his bachelor’s degree as well as beginning classes toward his master’s degree, also in engineering. He was offered a high paying job recently that would pay him more money than his family had “ever known”. He indicated that with a master’s degree he will gain even more knowledge and make even more money in the future. He also expressed that music will always be a part of his life. He plays his instrument in his church every Sunday and knows that wherever he ends up living and working he will find a church home and possibly a community band to continue his passion.

Brianna. Brianna was a sophomore at a large public four-year university in the southeastern United States. She was a pre-med student studying Kinesiology. She was African-American and grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana. Neither parent had a college degree. Her father tried college for one semester and dropped out. Her mother, however, was inspired by Brianna going to college, and enrolled in a community college. Her father worked in a dairy and now works on an oil platform. Her mother worked as a hair stylist but did not always have consistent work. She described her mother’s lack of regular work as follows: “She doesn’t stay at jobs because she feels like if she gets mistreated she’s just going to leave. She’s not going to put up with it.”

Brianna also has a younger sister of college age attending a bridge program at the same university as Brianna while taking classes at the local community college. The program was designed to give students who are not ready for a four-year college the experience and resources needed to be able to transfer to the four-year college after one year.
Brianna describes the neighborhoods that she grew up in as not being safe:

We stayed in this complex where they were considered the ghetto. It wasn’t that bad, to me, because I was just a kid. So I didn’t know any better, but according to my mom it was a bad neighborhood. Then we moved to where we stay now, and it was okay growing up, but now the crimes are starting to get so bad. We basically have a criminal that lives down the street. He’s been to jail already, but he keeps getting out . . . I mean, it’s like petty thefts and stuff like that, but I’m pretty sure he’s probably killed people and they just don’t have him. I don’t know. I don’t like it anymore. I don’t feel safe staying there. We’re trying to move, but we have to have money to do that.

When reflecting on her public school experience Brianna had some issues with the schools. There was an elementary school that she was supposed to go to but there was another school that was actually right by her house.

There was a school that’s right in our neighborhood, right in the front. Then behind us there’s another one. My mom chose to go to the other one. It was majority white. There were good teachers. All my teachers were good. Most of them were white. We probably had a few black teachers, but they were still equally good.

The middle school she attended was also in her neighborhood. She believed that the teachers were not highly competent and that the county was practicing institutional racism by adjusting the zones for attendance in schools along racial and economic lines. “I think it was really for the low income students because that’s what it seemed like was there”.

Her high school experience mirrored her previous experiences. She indicated, “They were trying to make me go to the predominant black school with the teachers who really don’t care.” She had no choice; however, the new school had an International Baccalaureate Program.
“I ended up getting into the IB program, the International Baccalaureate Program. So I had to be in honors in order to go to that high school.”

When reflecting on her decision to attend college Brianna shared:

I think I always wanted to go to college. It was just something that was in my mind. I don’t know. Nobody really told me, “Oh, you have to go to college.” I used to watch a lot of sports. I used to watch the [current school] football team and basketball. The year they won the national championship, I was like, “Oh my God! I can’t wait to go to [current school]!” It wasn’t even an academic reason. I was like, “I want to go there because it looks fun. I love football. The football games look fun,” and then, as I got into high school, I was just like, “Yeah. I’m going to go to [current school].

Brianna also shared that she was a part of the TRIO program called Upward Bound. This is a federally-funded, college-preparatory program that serves low-income and first-generation high school students. The program took place on a private college campus close to her neighborhood.

Brianna has been dancing since she was three years old. Her mother took her to the neighborhood studio where she learned ballet, jazz, tap, and African dance. She participated in her middle and high school’s dance teams and upon entering college looked to continue dancing there as well. She indicated that she spends six hours per week in dance classes each semester.

**Brianna’s college experience.** Brianna spent six hours per week in dance classes. She was taking a ballet and modern class. Brianna spoke highly of her ballet teacher as well as the students in her dance classes. She said that many of the students have been taking ballet exclusively for many years and she feels behind but incredibly supported by her teacher and other dancers in the class. She also shared that she was part of a student organization that
supported the dance program at the college. She enjoyed the meetings where the ballet and modern dance people talk about the different priorities, and she and some friends were trying to get hip-hop classes as part of the program. Even though these styles were very different, she believed the common aim among the members of the group to further dance opportunities for all on campus was the priority:

There are some that they’re into ballet and then there’s some into modern, and we really want to get hip-hop going. So there’s a good relationship with those girls too because when you’re trying to get dance known on campus. So there’s an understanding between us, what we want, you know, for dance.

Brianna indicated that her ballet class pushed her outside of her comfort zone. In the class she was always comparing herself to the other dancers, most who have been taking ballet for many years. She described her feelings:

I will feel very, very, very uncomfortable. We have to do things across the floor, and I. . .

It’s the same situation. I just feel like I don’t have it. I don’t know. So ballet, it just really takes me out of my comfort zone.

**Mark.** Mark is a junior who attended a large (~18,500) public four-year university in the southwest United States. He grew up with both parents out in the country on a large plot of land. His father was in college for one semester before he dropped out and his mother has attempted to go to college at different times but with no success. Mark described his parents as very religious and he was raised that way. His mother worked in an elementary school library and his father worked as a painting and drywall contractor. Mark shared that he has been helping his father on jobs since he was 5 years old. Mark is a triplet, and also has a brother two years older than he and his triplet brothers. Mark described his public school experience as being uneventful. He
mentioned good teachers and bad teachers as well as good students and some gang issues at his high school.

Mark has been a saxophone player since joining the school band in the sixth grade. It was his love of band and the impact that his high school band director had on him that greatly influenced him to attend college:

I was a sophomore in marching band. For some reason that year we did very well compared to previous years at that high school. Just feeling that success, sort of, and how much our band director had a passion for what he was doing made me just be like, “Man,” just to see someone have so much passion in one thing made me want to have that same sort of passion, but if I could have chosen anything for it to put that into, that sort of passion into, it would have been band just because that’s what was taking so much of my life at the time. I was like, “You know? I think I can put a lot of my heart into this as well.”

His older brother and the other two triplets all attended the same university and all lived together in a house near campus. Finances were a defining factor in where Mark went to school:

I ended up coming to [current school], I mean, while it is still a pretty good school, I probably would have chose somewhere else if in-state tuition wasn’t a factor. There’s the whole aspect of having to pay more to go out of state and everything.

Even with in-state tuition, with having four boys from the same family in college Mark was doubtful he could be attending any school if not for the scholarships he and his brothers have received:

We were lucky enough to get a pretty decent scholarship. Otherwise, I mean, we may have struggled to get us all here because I mean, the three of us are going to [current
college] and plus our older brother is about to graduate, so if it weren’t for those scholarships I don’t know if I would be here right now.

Mark and his siblings feel supported by their parents while in college. Mark indicated that his father brings up his drywall and painting business as motivation for the boys to finish their degrees:

Man, my parents could not be more proud. They struggled with that during that particular time of their life, going to college for them and everything and that just didn’t really work out, so the fact that they see us going through that and being successful really, really makes them proud. Then, our dad always just really encouraged us because he’s all, “You’ve worked with me painting and drywall. You don’t want to do it when you’re done. I don’t want you to do it when you’re done, so please get an education and get a good job,” so that is kind of how they feel about that.

*Mark’s college experience.* Mark spent between 18 and 25 hours per week in band. Mark said that due to a lack of good saxophone players on his campus, he was asked to play in many groups. These groups took up 13 hours of rehearsal per week and to prepare for each of the groups he practices between 1 and 3 hours per day.

I always loved jazz, so of course, I’m in jazz now. Then, I did marching band freshman year and then also sophomore year and then I’m about to do it again. Unfortunately the saxophone studio here is getting pretty small, so this past semester especially, was one of the busiest as far as the ensemble that I was in. Just because there was a shortage of saxophones I’ve been in both jazz bands, wind ensemble and symphonic band and the saxophone quartet here. I was, this semester was really busy for me, but it was
rewarding. There came a moment when I felt like I was like, “Ugh, I’m always rehearsing.”

Mark indicated that he knew close to 100 people very well on campus due to his involvement in the different groups he was involved in.

I feel like, let’s see, whenever we’re just hanging out in the lobby before classes start I can walk up to almost anyone and talk to them just because I feel like we, just because of rehearsing and all sort of other things, sectionals and everything else that we’ve kind of just like developed some sort of bond. It just seems like every band kid I just know very well.

In regards to high expectations at college, Mark mentioned the marching band director and the jazz band director. He spoke about the marching band director being new to the school and wanting to raise the standard for that ensemble and that some people were upset but others like himself, who take the ensemble very seriously, welcomed the higher expectations. Mark described a tactic used by his jazz band director to raise expectations as follows:

In jazz band there have been a few days where the director just says, like this past semester he would give us a piece one day and he says, “I want this ready tomorrow and if it’s not ready don’t come to rehearsal,” so everyone just kind of kicked it into gear and by the next rehearsal the piece that we just got the day before was actually almost ready to perform. It was really exciting, but it’s a lot of work.

Mark shared individual and group experiences that were both significant moments for him since being in college. The individual one involved being selected to perform in the honors recital at the end of the semester. He remarked of that experience, “Wow. I can do this. I don’t have to settle. I can keep going if I want to, that has impacted me a lot.” The group experience
involved a marching band trip where the band performed their show at an NFL game featuring his favorite NFL team. Mark describes himself as a lifelong fan of this team and described his feelings at the game as, “Man, I love what we’re doing. This is really fun.”

Mark also shared that without music, his life would be “sad.” He also brought up one of his brothers who was not involved in music at all in college. He remarked that although he has many friends, his brother’s only friends are the ones he knew from high school.

There’s my brother who is a mechanical engineering major and he’s double majoring in mechanical engineering and aerospace engineering and he has some friends, but most of them are from high school that are going here, so he tries to keep in touch with them.

**Lee.** Lee was a senior majoring in biological science at a large (>20,000) public four-year university in the southern United States. He grew up with his mother and father and has an older brother. Lee is Asian-American. His mother and father moved to the United States from Korea a few years before Lee was born. Both Lee and his older brother were born in the United States. Lee’s parents own a dry cleaning business.

Lee described the neighborhood that he grew up in as typical middle class, a place where he was safe to ride his bike to the nearby park. He liked the schools he attended and remembered his teachers as being nice. He joined band in the fifth grade and continued through high school. He spoke highly of his high school band experience and credited his assistant band director as being a major influence on going to college:

The assistant band director, she really was a big influence. Just a really good role model for how I wanted to be. Without her I wouldn’t have done half the things that made me into me, and it really pushed me to go to college, even if I wasn’t doing arts or band in college. She really helped me go and decide to go to college and go through with that.
Lee also credited his parents as having a major impact on his attending college. He shared, “My family was like, ‘You’re going to go to college. You’re going to become a doctor, and you’re going to make money.’ I was like, ‘Okay.’ You know, they’re really Asian.”

Finances were the defining circumstance as to where Lee ended up going to college. Lee was attending the largest public school in the state. The state where he grew up and where he attended college is one of a handful of southern states that uses lottery money to pay for eligible students’ tuition. To keep the tuition scholarship from the state, Lee had to maintain a certain grade point average and complete a minimum number of credits each semester.

**Lee’s college experience.** Lee spent between 15 and 20 hours per week in dance. Lee participated in band in high school, and although he spoke fondly of his time in band he made the decision not to participate in band in college. Not wanting to give up his passion for the performing arts altogether, Lee looked into the dance program at his college:

I met with the current ballet professor, and I was talking with her and she was asking me why I wanted to do dance, and would I be willing to do ballet, and stuff like that. I was like, “Yeah, I mean, I would definitely love to experience all the different forms of dance.” I really wanted to go further with that, and so I started taking ballet and modern, and it was amazing. It was one of the best things I decided to do. It was a really cool stress reliever, for one, because I was dying from school, and then it was also a good way to stay in shape. I just found so many good things about it. I just wanted to keep doing it, so I’ve taken dance classes every semester since.

Lee mentioned that his closest friends at school were friends from dance class, including people he went to high school with but who were not friends until that shared dance experience in college. He has also made many friends that did not attend his high school:
A lot of people from my high school that I didn’t talk to before, now I’m really good friends with. People that weren’t from my high school, too . . . It’s easy to become friends with them, because we all have an interest in dance, and we all really love it, so it’s easy to just be around those people if they like the same things you do. Also, they’re very good people, so it was good friendships and relationships to make.

As for what dance has meant for Lee:

Thinking about graduating, the only thing that makes me really sad is not being able to dance and take classes for me like this. I really don’t want dance to end. After I graduate . . . It’s been so good to me, and I don’t want to leave right now. It’s very close to me personally.

Gloria. Gloria grew up in a large southern city with both parents and a younger brother. Her mother went to a community college for a semester before she dropped out and her father attended a large public four-year university for two years before he dropped out. Her father worked at a shipyard and her mother was a deputy tax assessor for the city where they lived. Gloria described the neighborhood where she grew up as not being the best neighborhood. She continued with her description:

There have been some shootings in my neighborhood, but never have they really directly affected us. No damage or, we weren't involved in any kind of way. They happened while we were safe indoors. I never really talked to our neighbors or anything because of that.

Gloria’s elementary school experience she described as “normal”. She attended a magnet middle school the first year the school opened, and then each year the school dropped its lowest grade and added an upper grade, gradually becoming a high school. Because of this, she attended this same school for seven years.
She credited her school with being the key motivator to attend college. She also spoke about how her parents were not involved in the college application process (pushing to go to college, applying to colleges, applying for housing, etc.) and that it was her counselors who motivated her but in the end she did everything herself.

They pushed, they made it very known that if you want to be successful in life you need to go to college. They set it up with what we needed to go to college, so why not go? They pushed ACT testing and good grades, all that good stuff. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have even thought about college.

Finances were a determining factor for where she applied and subsequently enrolled in college. Gloria also lived in one of a few states where proceeds from the state lottery sales go to fund tuition. Her scholarship depended on academic and enrollment standards. She was also a resident assistant at the university, so her housing and food costs were covered.

Gloria began taking dance classes in the seventh grade. Her high school had a dance team that she was a member of and was the captain of the team her senior year. She reflected on her high school dance experience:

I didn't really enjoy any subject in school. I always looked forward to dance team practice at the end of the day. That's what kept me through high school. It was in tenth grade that I realized that dance is what makes me happy.

**Gloria’s college experience.** Once in college, Gloria immediately signed up for dance classes. She indicated that she spent approximately thirteen hours per week in dance classes and other dance related activities. She has involved herself with a student organization whose mission is to support the dance program at her college.
Gloria credited a trip that the dance department at her college made with fostering relationships. Prior to the trip she indicated that often in dance class, students would show up, go through class and then leave with very little time to socialize. However, on the trip that she mentioned, the students drove for more than nine hours to get to the event, and stayed in a hotel together for four days. They also shared many experiences at this event. She commented:

I was in class with this girl every day for a whole semester and we never spoke. Then, this semester when we went on the trip to [dance festival], I drove my car and she was in the car with me. We bonded, and now we talk every day, and we're really close, despite not being in class together right now.

In her freshman year, Gloria was cast as a dancer in the university’s production of a Broadway musical. She spoke about the experience being very meaningful for her, as she had never done anything like that before. She had danced throughout high school and continued in college but had never been involved in a musical.

When Gloria spoke about high expectations she spoke about her daily dance technique classes. She shared that very day in dance class, everyone is vulnerable. She indicated that her and the other students are taught a move and then perform it in groups. Everyone watched how everyone else performed and you have immediate personal feedback because you are in a dance studio lined with mirrors. She shared that this experience helped her with her academics. She indicated that in a “real” class it would be easy for her to lose focus because the feedback took so long in terms of getting assignments back. But when she thought about the daily feedback in dance class it helped her remain focused on the other classes.

Jenny. Jenny was a junior education major at a large university (~18,500 students) in the southwestern United States. Her father worked as a mechanic and her mother does not work.
She had a little sister who was still in high school. Both parents wanted to go to college, but due to finances and then starting a family only her mother attempted community college; she dropped out after one semester. Jenny grew up in a trailer park outside of the city where she was in college. She indicated that her neighborhood was a stressful place to grow up:

> We lived in a trailer park. We were the only white family in the neighborhood. Most of the other families were either African-American or Hispanic, sometimes that would cause fights in the neighborhood, so that was always a little bit stressful. There was gang activity. Definitely, some drugs being sold, we always knew that there was like, that there was a place nearby that you knew, you didn’t go by that house at like certain times because they dealt. Me and my family, we just tried to keep to ourselves because we didn’t want get involved in the drugs that was going around and stuff. Plus, nobody wanted to talk to us because we were white.

Both of Jenny’s parents pushed academics on her as early as kindergarten and she credited this priority on academics as the reason why she was able to attend better schools in the city. She challenged herself in school by taking honors level classes.

> My parents always pushed me really, really hard to achieve high academically because they wanted me to be able to go to college. That was something that was talked about from when I was in kindergarten, was “You’re going to go to college, you’re going to be the first person.” So, they were preparing me for that.

Her family’s finances were the determining factor of where she ended up attending college:

> I ended up getting the highest academic scholarship that [present college] offers, which is the President’s Associate Scholarship. It’s 15 incoming freshmen chosen from the pool
that apply to [her college], they’re given full scholarship plus a large stipend to help them with their studies, so that was really, really helpful.

Being the first in her family on track to graduate from college was at times exciting but stressful. She mentioned that speaking with her relatives about school was analogous to coming home from a trip to a foreign country and sharing that experience with them. Jenny also articulated the pressure she felt to finish her degree:

It’s exciting. My relatives are always asking me, “What are your classes like?” It’s like I’ve traveled to a different country in a lot of ways. It’s just exciting and it gives me this feeling like my family, our family’s going to change directions because my kids will go to college and their kids will go to college. I feel like I can’t fail because if I do, I will severely not only let down my family, but really let down this driving force that’s pushing me forward.

Jenny described the “driving force” as something her parents instilled in her. She said her entire life her parents always pushed her to learn more and to be the best at anything she tried.

Jenny participated in choir from the sixth grade all throughout high school. She described her time in choir:

Choir was family number two. We were a very tight-knit group always, that was pretty much everybody that you hung out with. If you were in choir, everybody in choir was your friend. It was a really, really positive experience.

Jenny was a four-year member of the all-state choir, an achievement that allowed her to travel to the music educators’ conference each year to perform with other top chorus members from across her state. Additionally, her high school choir traveled to Las Vegas, San Antonio, and
South Padre Island while she was a member. She credited these trips as the number one experience in making friends and ultimately wanting to continue with singing while in college.

**Jenny’s college experience.** Jenny spent 30 to 40 hours per week in singing and related activities and she spoke very fondly of the relationships she cultivated with both faculty and other students. She indicated that the directors who lead the groups that she participated in were “amazing.” They have mentored her and taught her “how to be a professional and how to interact with other musicians and with my students.” Her reference to “my students” was to the students she oversaw as a resident assistant on campus. Her closest friends were older students whom she indicated she befriended as a freshman; she described them as being “an amazing encouragement to me.” She described one of these older students: “She’s just been incredible like personal friend who’s helped me out with everything. If I ever have questions about anything, she’s always like “Oh, you do this or talk to this person.””

She talked about the bond she has with her peers in the ensembles and how she believed the “companionship” found in these groups contrasted with the loneliness of students she had as an RA who dropped out of school:

Well, it guarantees companionship. Being in an ensemble, we always joke around that “At the end of the year, we’re either going to love each other or hate each other, but either way, it’s going to be a strong bond.” So it guarantees companionship, which is great because in college I’ve noticed that my students over in the dorms that I take care of, when I see them drop out, it’s because they’re lonely a lot of the time. So, like having people around. It gives you a sense of purpose.
Jenny responded to a question regarding her most significant event or experience since she has been in college by describing a set of performances she had with a group that she co-founded:

There’s an Alzheimer’s care unit here in town and we were told going in, “A lot of these people who are living here right now, they don’t remember their families when they come in, they don’t recognize their own sons and daughters. So, just be patient, they won’t remember you when you come back in. You just got to reintroduce yourself every time you introduce the group.” We came in one time and we sang for them and one of our girls played the violin, and we came back 2 months later because of some issues and they remembered us. They saw us coming through the door, they’re like, [calling out the names of the students in the group]. Some of the people who work there were just, they were amazed. They were astounded. There was a man there who, he just sits there and he looks at the floor and he doesn’t really interact with anybody. We started, what was it that we played? It was like “Fly Me to the Moon” or something like that and he got up and started dancing and he grabbed me and we started dancing to “Fly Me to the Moon.” It was the most incredible experience I’ve ever had, hands down.

**Mabel.** Mabel was a junior majoring in geological physics at a large (>20,000 students) university in the southwestern United States. She was raised by her mother and her grandparents and never knew her father. Her mother never attended college and she worked in a billing department for a local college.

She described her neighborhood as nice although there were gangs and a recent drive-by shooting across the street:
It was pretty nice. There was a lot of gangs really that kind of hung around. It really wasn’t a problem because when I was young I didn’t hang out with them. Then most recently . . . There was a drive-by across the street. I heard the whole thing. It was really weird. Well, I couldn’t tell it was one at first. My window was open when I was sleeping. I hear a bunch of pops and then I didn’t know what it was. Then the police came by and we went outside. We had holes in the cars.

She described herself as self-motivated to attend college:

I knew that I needed to get a higher education so then I could open up doors for myself. I could financially support myself and the rest of my family, and be able to do things that I want to do in life.

However, once in college, her mother motivated her by placing a picture of a big house on her bedroom door so that she will see it every day and continue to work hard towards her degree.

Well my mom put up a picture up on my door. You’ve seen Forrest Gump right?

You know the house that they have? The really big house. The white house. She put a picture of that on my door, because I love that house. She said once you graduate you can buy a house like that. So, I see it every day when I come in and out of my room.

Mabel has participated in instrumental music since the sixth grade. She was a member of her high school band for all 4 years, performing in the percussion section in many different groups all throughout high school. She also performed with the all-region band for 2 years. The all-region band is an audition-only group of the best players from the entire area who come together to perform a concert.

Mabel’s college experience. Although not a music major, once in college Mabel immersed herself in music classes:
I joined everything, almost everything. I was in marching band, percussion ensemble and I was taking lessons. I was in percussion ensemble, wind ensemble, orchestra, steel drum band, and also I did a group outside of [school]. It’s the [city’s] Symphony Orchestra’s younger band. I did that on the side every Sunday. I was first chair in everything because I worked really hard. I really liked my teacher. I was principal in orchestra, wind ensemble. I was the percussion ensemble manager. I took upper level lessons. I took some music classes, theory, aural skills, music history, stuff like that.

When asked about how much time she devoted each week to music she originally answered between 6 and 15 hours. She then commented that those hours are just the hours she put into personal practice outside of rehearsal. She then added that she was in rehearsals between 30 and 32 hours per week on top of her practice time.

Mabel mentioned five professors in the music department who have written letters of recommendation for her and found work for her as a music teacher working with young students and working on the summer staff for high school bands throughout the state. She did however single out her private lesson teacher as a very special relationship:

I guess the most important relationship I have was with my private instructor, Mr. [private teacher] I guess because you get to see them alone, in a room, once a week for an hour, maybe 30 minutes and you get to practice your solos. There is a lot of good time that you spend with them and you get to know each other. I ended up getting sick in 2011 and it was very detrimental. I ended up not finishing some of my classes. Mr. [private teacher] had went through a similar situation and he let me know that I wasn’t alone. Anytime, he said, that something happened that I should call him because he knew what I was going through. We have a very, very close relationship. That’s another
reason why I’m still in all the groups, because he gave to me and I want to give back to him.

When speaking about expectations, she mentioned that her private teacher signed her up for a concerto competition. She said that this was not something she would have done on her own and it was an incredible amount of hard work. During the process her teacher told her that her performance had to be 100% perfect. On the day of the competition she performed at noontime and the results were posted online later that afternoon. Later that day she checked the web site with the results and shared the following:

I was looking online and it had the results and I saw my name and I was just like, oh, okay. Then I looked at it again and it said winner. I freaked out. The first thing I did was call Mr. [private teacher] and he was crying and his wife was crying.

Winning the competition allowed Mabel to perform her concerto with the local orchestra. This was one of the most meaningful experiences of her college career.

Another meaningful experience that Mabel shared was that her teacher would trust her to run percussion ensemble rehearsals if he ran late. This was meaningful and also placed additional high expectations on her.

I guess the most meaningful is getting the opportunity to teach, through Mr. [percussion teacher]. There’s been some times where he can’t make it to percussion ensemble because he’s running late because he lives in [another city] and has to commute. He will call me and say hey, I want you to run percussion ensemble until I get there. For me, that he trusts me to do that is a lot . . . I feel like honored to do that.

These seven narratives provide a background for each participant as well as summaries of their experiences growing up, their cocurricular activity, and their time in college up to this
point. The intention is to present each participant’s lived experience in as many of his or her own words as possible, providing a rich description of each one.

**Emergent Themes**

The analysis of the interview data yielded four superordinate themes and ten supporting or subordinate themes. Smith (2011) states the importance of how to define a superordinate theme. He recommends that for a sample size greater than six, that at least a third or a half of participants reflect the theme in their responses to be labeled a superordinate theme. However, to enhance the validity of the findings using only themes that are present in all of the participants should be considered. Therefore, the identification of all four superordinate themes resulted from similar experiences shared by all seven participants. Additionally, Smith (2011) recommends that for a sample size of seven, that at least three participant’s extracts be presented to show density of evidence. Therefore at least three excerpts for each theme will be provided and when deemed to add value, more than the minimum will be presented. Table 2 provides a listing of the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged through the analysis.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of Belonging</th>
<th>Sense of Meaning</th>
<th>Personal Growth</th>
<th>Situational Pressure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Aloneness</td>
<td>• Altruism</td>
<td>• Success in the activity</td>
<td>• Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer connections</td>
<td>• Passion</td>
<td>• Academic success</td>
<td>• Familial pressure</td>
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<td>• Faculty connections</td>
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<td>• Contentment</td>
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**Sense of belonging.** Sense of belonging was one superordinate theme that emerged in the data. Participants discussed that, due to being the first in their family to attend college, their families did not understand the experience they had undertaken and they often felt alone during both the application process as well as once at college. However, there were many factors
provided by cocurricular activities that mitigated this sense of being alone that include meaningful connections with peers met in their chosen activity as well as with the faculty that led the activity. This section will be broken down into aloneness, and connections that include both faculty and friends.

**Aloneness.** The data revealed that at some point or other, either during the application process for college, or attending college, these participants experienced being alone. Gloria revealed that her parents did not help her with her college application process, “They didn't help me apply for college. Then when I got accepted… they didn't help me apply for housing or anything like that. I did it all myself.”

Brianna found herself alone during her first semester. Although her roommate was also African-American she indicated that they did not share a common background, “I was just all alone and my roommate, she's spoiled kind of. She's like one of those kind of privileged black kids.” Brianna further explained that she felt alone even though she was on a campus with thousands of other students. She recalled it was not until she accepted herself for who she is and made changes such as letting her hair go “natural,” and joining dance classes that she developed a sense of belonging.

Gloria revealed a pattern of communication difficulty with family, which made her feel alone. She explained that she gets annoyed with her family asking questions about her school experience, “It's really hard to explain to them what it's like because neither of them finished college. We don't talk about it much just because it's so annoying for me to have to explain every little thing.”
Lee indicated that living alone was stressful and that because his parents did not attend college he felt that his experience was not the same as his contemporaries whose parents did attend college. Lee explained:

Knowing that my parents didn't go to college kind of makes it a little harder, because I know a lot of my friends, their parents went to college so they have advice. Trying to find someone who can lead me in the right way during college is a little challenging. Lee felt challenged as far as not having a role model to whom he could turn to for advice like his other friends whose parents attended college could.

The participants made sense of their experiences of being first-generation students in different ways. Brianna stated that the physical alteration of her hair was part of “coming out of her shell.” And, although the participants reported their families as being supportive, it was difficult for some of the participants to speak openly with their families about attending college. Gloria was not comfortable discussing her experience with her family. Lee spoke about peers whose parents did attend college and how he felt that left him without a resource of a parent to whom he could ask advice.

**Peer connections.** The greatest impact on the college experience for all seven participants was the meaningful relationships that were fostered in their cocurricular activities. The relationships were with students as well as with faculty leaders of their activities. When speaking about relationships, all seven participants had many things to say about their friends and most influential teachers.
Table 3

Friendship Quotes by Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Friend Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>“I think the friendships made are everlasting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>“All the relationships that I’ve recently formed, they’re all uplifting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>“I feel like we, just because of rehearsing and all sort of other things, sectionals and everything else that we’ve kind of just like developed some sort of bond. It just seems like every band kid I just know very well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>“We would practice, help each other, and became really good friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>“We became really good friends actually through the dance classes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>“Whenever I’m in here [music center], I feel like I walk into just a large group of friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>“I do see them in [other classes], having to know those people [through band], you can relate to each other.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jorge was finishing up an engineering degree as well as beginning classes towards his master’s degree. Because of this he was very busy with his academics but the bond with his band friends remains very strong:

I’ve always felt that, especially from band members, people who were playing music and to this day, I still hang out with them, especially right now, because I am more busy with my engineering stuff, I still hang out with them at least every week to go out and eat or do something, or get together in someone’s house, or just hang out. We built just so much connection with each other, just the fact that we were in band and we were able to connect through it. I think the friendships made are everlasting. Everything as a whole with how college works and the friends that I’ve made here, I think it’s been wonderful. I don’t know how else to put it. Just the friends that I’ve made, it’s been great.
**Faculty connections.** The participants all had positive experiences to share about the faculty who lead their chosen activity. Two participants, Lee and Mabel, shared the feeling of comfort they gained from close faculty interactions, and this contrasts with participants’ previously described feelings of loneliness and isolation. Jenny referred to her choir director as her “second mom.” Lee shared that all of the different dance teachers he had were a positive influence on him. There is one teacher that Lee wanted to stay in touch with:

I really want to keep up with this professor outside of classes and just stay in touch, because she’s such a . . . I don’t know how to say it besides that it’s just a very good energy to be around. She’s very open and comfortable with herself, which makes me feel comfortable with myself.

Mark shared that because of his relationship, his teacher set greater expectations and standards for him, “She [private teacher] was like, "Dude, you need to be practicing like three hours a day just for lesson stuff let alone ensemble stuff." I was like, "Wow, that's a huge standard. A big expectation."

Mabel indicated that the most important relationship she has at college was with her private instructor. This relationship with her private instructor, fostered in one-hour weekly increments over a period of three years, resulted in a bond that she believed saved her life:

When I got sick I ended up going to the UBH, which is the University Behavioral Health Center. I had an episode that I couldn’t control. I ended up going there for 5 days, not under my will. I got forced to go there. As soon as I knew I was going to go that Monday I immediately went to Mr. [teacher] and I came to him before I had to leave. He was the last person that I saw. I ran to his office and I told him, hey, I’m going to be gone for a while and he asked why and I told him I had this huge break from reality and
he says “You’re going to be okay. Call me every day.” I wrote his number down because you can’t have your cell phone, you can’t even have shoelaces when you’re there. I went there and every single day when I got a break, I called him, and I let him know what was going on and he let me know that everything was going to be okay. If it wasn’t for him after I got out I don’t know . . . I probably, honestly, in my opinion . . . It’s a little drastic, but I don’t think I’d be alive now, because of my relationship with him.

The participants who took private lessons spoke about the bonds with their teachers. Mabel credited her still being alive to her teacher being there for her in her greatest time of need. All seven participants shared many stories regarding positive relationships fostered in their chosen activity. These friendships meant different things for different participants. Jorge relied on his band friends more as his engineering course load intensified. Lee, Mabel, and Jenny enjoyed close bonds with faculty. Mark’s relationship with his private teacher set hirer expectations for him. And Mabel credited her relationship with her teacher as saving her life. Based on the data, these relationships have had a positive impact on each participant’s college experience and have helped create a sense of belonging.

**Sense of meaning.** Sense of meaning was another superordinate theme that emerged from the data. Participants spoke of an altruistic desire to “give back” by either taking care of family members, inspiring other family members, breaking the “chain” of not attending college, or by sharing their passion by teaching after graduation. The data also revealed a commitment to their activities that provided a sense of meaning. This section will be broken down into two subordinate themes, altruism and passion.

**Altruism.** All seven participants spoke about giving back. Some spoke about giving back to their family while others spoke about giving back to society. When discussing the future, with
the exception of Mabel having a picture of the big white house from the movie Forest Gump taped to her bedroom door, none of the participants spoke about themselves or material possessions, but a desire to promote the welfare of others.

Table 4
Altruistic Quotes by Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Altruistic Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>“I want to give back to my parents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>“wants to be an inspiration for my mom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>“to eventually give other people the opportunities that I had”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>“to share [choreography] with the public”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>“My children won’t have to have the stress of worrying about money”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>&quot;I don't ever want somebody in a nursing home to experience that [loneliness], and what I have to give is my music.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>“You want to give back to your family.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Mabel and Jorge spoke very explicitly about wanting to help their families as soon as they become employed after college. Mabel shared, “Once I graduate . . . Because I know pretty much how much I’m going to be getting paid. It’s really exciting. You want to give back to your family. I’m excited to do that.” Jorge too was ready to take care of his family:

I want to give back to my parents in whatever they need. They once did it for me. Now, let me do it back to them, or anybody else in my family, my aunts, my uncles, and my
grandma. It makes me happy that I’ve gone so far with so much hard work put into it and I am finally able to achieve it. It’s a good feeling.

Gloria also spoke about being able to help her family financially, but she put it in the perspective of having a better life for her children than the one she experienced growing up sharing, “My children won’t have to have the stress of worrying about money like I had to worry about money.” Although Mabel, Jorge, and Gloria spoke about helping their families financially, being able to help families in different ways motivated other students.

Brianna and Jenny spoke about being an inspiration for other family members. Brianna shared that she “wants to be an inspiration for my mom.” Her mother was attempting to complete an associate’s degree at the local community college. She also spoke about her little sister. “The same thing for my sister, because she’s always looked up to me.” Jenny spoke about breaking a cycle of not going to college and setting a new precedent for future generations of her family:

It’s just exciting and it gives me this feeling like my family, our family’s going to change directions because my kids will go to college and their kids will go to college, maybe we’ll all start a chain.

While the examples above illustrated the participant’s desires to give back to family members, other participants stated they want to give back to the larger community. Since taking dance in college Brianna changed her major from pre-med to kinesiology so she could incorporate dance in her profession. She explained, “I can be a physical therapist for kids, but I can use dancing as a therapy.” She envisioned being able to work with children with any type of movement issues and not only using dance as part of the rehabilitation process but also having performances with the children.
Jenny provided two examples of why she wants to give back after graduating: teaching and performing for those in need. She had the opportunity to teach voice lessons to middle school children. She indicated that sharing her music with children that age was “incredibly inspiring.” Jenny also co-founded a performing group. The group performed at a home for Alzheimer’s patients. She described the performance as being “the most incredible experience” as their music touched many of the patients and got reactions out of them that the nurses commented they had not seen prior. She indicated that these experiences were so meaningful for her that she wants to always be able to give back.

Jorge also saw music as being not only a part of his life after college but as a way to give back to the community:

Even after I leave college, I plan to keep working with my church choir. I also play my clarinet there and help the music director there, help him, whatever they need. Let me help you get in tune with people or even the voice. I can get them in tune. I've done that so much, and whatever it is. Just the fact that there is music in my life, it just fulfills or fills up the little thing I am missing in my engineering circle.

As an engineer he indicated that he will probably have to move to another city. The first thing he will do will be, “to go find a church and I am going to find myself into [join] that choir or that music director to help out in any way I can.”

**Passion.** The focus of this section was on the participants’ passion for their activity. This passion manifested itself in two ways: one was how the participants described their feelings about their activity, and the second was their passion as evidenced by the amount of time spent in their chosen activity.
Although the participants were dancers, singers, or instrumentalists, they were participating in many different venues related to their chosen activity. The dancers took different classes and found different performance opportunities. The band students performed in groups as diverse as the marching band, jazz band, and orchestra. And the singer also found diverse avenues for participation such as choir, barbershop, and a group she co-founded. They participated and spent a great deal of time in these activities because they describe being enthusiastic and excited to do so. When asked by his engineering friends why he is still in band Jorge explained:

People in engineering, they are like, “Why are you in band?” Or even more, “Why are you still in band?” I am like, “You don’t understand. You’ve never lived it. You don’t know what it means to be in band.” Even though my thing right now is engineering, band is still my passion, my thing and I just can’t let it go. The fact that I am still doing band, and I always say, I love engineering, I love what I am doing, but it’s not complete without having band there.

Jorge used the word “lived.” He indicated that he is “living” band, and that although he loved engineering, he was passionate about band and would not be complete without it.

Brianna shared that her passion transfers to her other classes, “I take some of that passion that leaks out of ballet and I put into other classes just so I can do just as well or hopefully just as well in.”

In the following quote, Mark actually combined both ways that passion is being described. He described his experience of feeling passion by putting so much time into his activity:
That [band] has been my passion ever since [and] if I could choose anything to put that sort of passion into, it would be band just because that's what is taking so much of my life. I think I can put a lot of my heart into this as well.

On top of their academics, commuting to and from school, and working many hours, all of the participants chose to spend many hours per week in their chosen activity. All seven participants spent a minimum of six hours per week in their chosen activity. Five of the seven participants spent up to thirty hours per week in their chosen activity and two of the seven spent thirty or more hours per week in their activity.

The following three examples represented each of the different types of activities that the participants participated in: dance, band, and choir. The examples showed the amount of time spent on the activity by the participants. Gloria stayed busy in many different dance related activities:

I'm taking ballet this semester. I've auditioned for [dance team], which is hip-hop dance team at [current school]. I auditioned once last year for the dance ensemble class, and I'm auditioning again this semester. I danced in an opera last spring. I was in the physical theater showcase last spring. I went to the American College Dance Festival a few weeks ago. Last summer I went to New York for three weeks to take a dance intensive.

Jorge indicated that he spent up to twenty hours per week in band related activities:

Just class time itself was three, four and a half hours a week, not to mention late rehearsals and performances. Performances, they were all day. We would be here at eight in the morning and we wouldn't leave that Saturday for football games until one in the morning. We would be here all day, and then again, ensembles. Again, it was three hours a week, and that's just class time again. Sometimes, you needed to go home and
you've got to sit in front of your stand and you've got to go over this run. Clarinets, you have a big run, so you better get them together in time. You were still going home and I don't know, maybe practicing another two - three hours a week, maybe.

Jenny, who spent the most time out of any of the participants in cocurricular activities, shared:

I would say between opera, choir, [name of group], and barber shop, it's like a full-time job. You always have rehearsal or you have a meeting or you're practicing on your own. Or if not, you're thinking about it, so probably a good 30, 40 hours a week.

**Personal growth.** All of the participants shared examples of success, both in their cocurricular activity and in their academics. Some shared that they developed skills in their cocurricular activity that transferred and had an impact on their academics, while others developed confidence in the art activity that fostered a sense of self-efficacy in their academics. The data revealed that happiness or contentment as major results of their participation in their activities and were mentioned often by the participants. While success is often viewed as an external attribute, each participant linked his or her success story to an internal attribute such as self-confidence, self-belief, or contentment. This section will be broken down into three subgroups: success in activity, academic success, and contentment.

**Success in activity.** All seven participants shared at least one meaningful success story related to their activity and how it impacted them. They also indicated that their most meaningful college experiences are tied to these successes. These successes are both personal and group accomplishments and took place in rehearsals as well as performance.

As part of a dance composition class that he took as a senior, Lee composed a piece that was showcased at the final dance performance of the year. It made him think about dance from
the perspective of teacher-artist. He explained how meaningful the process of composing an original piece of art was:

It’s really made me think about my experiences and myself, because, especially this semester, since I’m creating a piece, I had to think about what I wanted the piece to be. I picked something very personal, and it’s made me really look back and evaluate myself. Then to share that with the dancers and eventually the public . . . I still don’t know if I’m comfortable with it, but just being able to do it, even when I’m uncomfortable . . . It’s very personal. It’s very close to me, and so, being able to share something with the public through dancing, which I enjoy a lot — it’s very close to me now. It’s definitely changed and improved who I am, and it’s something that I hope I continue.

For Mark there was the successful experience of winning a spot in the honors recital at the end of the year, and he also remembered fondly the NFL game at which his school’s marching band performed. Reflecting upon the honors recital he shared “Wow. I can do this. I don't have to settle. I can keep going if I want to, which that has impacted me a lot.” Mark’s experience opened his thinking to the future, that he does not have to settle on how things were in the past and that if he puts the work in, he can be successful now and in the future.

Mabel won a concerto competition and performed with the local orchestra. She indicated that “we practiced and we practiced and [her teacher] said, ‘you need to make sure you can play this piece at 100%. No wrong notes.” Her success of winning the competition opened many doors for Mabel. After her performance with the local professional orchestra, she started receiving requests to teach high school students private percussion lessons. Her teacher also asks her to teach for him when he is late or needs to miss rehearsal. Mabel shared that she is honored that her teacher trusts her to teach the percussion ensemble in his absence.
Gloria successfully auditioned for the school musical. She had never been in a Broadway musical prior. The experience provided her with a sense of happiness and contentment that remained with her and, “It just, again, reassured me, this feeling that I have right now is amazing and I need to do this every day.” This experience has given Gloria confidence to pursue her dream of performing in New York City, indicating that she wanted to move there after graduation.

**Academic success.** Each of the participants was academically successful based on the parameters set to be a part of the study. Each of them had at least a 3.0 GPA and they each persisted beyond their freshman year of college. What follows is a discussion concerning how the participants leveraged their different experiences resulting in their academic success. Some relied on friends they made in their activity for study help, others developed habits and behaviors in their activity that transferred to their academics, and for others, their activity is what kept them attending classes or even from dropping out of school during difficult times.

Mark and Mabel indicated that they relied on friends from band for help studying. Mark shared that, “There's a kid in our physics class who is a percussionist and he just does really well, so we like to get his help whenever we are studying for exams.” Mabel spoke about her friends and acquaintances from the many groups she participated in as a source of academic support:

It helps to know a lot of the people in the music department because there’s people who aren’t majors as well as I. I do see them in calculus and physics and stuff like that. Having to know those people, you know people to study with. That helps you get along because you know more people. You can study with them, you could do homework, you can relate to each other. It feels like you are not alone like, okay they’re in physics and they’re marching band so I know you even more. I see certain people in the hallway
every day. Especially like in the percussion studio, we hang out right outside this door. We have a lot of fun. I guess the most important thing about those relationships is that it kept me coming back to school.

These two examples show how relationships can evolve beyond just friendship and how the under-resourced, at-risk participants leveraged their newly acquired resources, in these instances friends from their cocurricular activities, to help them achieve their academic goals.

Both Jenny and Jorge shared a direct transfer of skills acquired through their activities. Jenny shared:

Never be late to rehearsal, always have everything prepared beforehand, be organized, don’t lose stuff. That all applies to the professional world . . . You’re always 5 minutes early, you always have all your paperwork done way before you get there, and you learn how to communicate with people effectively, whether it’s correcting something or whether it’s “Hey, we need to be here at this time,” or whatever. All of that has definitely transferred.

Jorge became much better at time management due to the amount of time required to be a leader in the band and to be academically successful in his major. Jorge described his time management:

I’ve created my own Excel schedule and I make sure, do I have time to do what I am doing or am I just putting too much in my plate? I think that reflects back again to whether I am doing band, engineering classes, my future career, my work, my job. Can you handle what you're doing or you just think you can? I think that's something that band has helped me with, because band has a lot of rehearsals, a lot of practices, performances. I had to go down the line. I had to be very specific. I am going to be
practicing from exactly six-thirty to seven-thirty. From there on, I cannot procrastinate, it's time to do homework. Then I am going to have my dinner. Then, I am planning on having seven hours of sleep. What time are you going to wake up? When are you going to eat breakfast?

Mark and Lee both described how their work ethic grew through their activities and how it affected their academics. When describing the work needed for an upcoming paper he had to write for a class, Mark shared that the music classes definitely helped him in his other courses:

There’s that whole attitude of knowing what kind of work needs to put in to something to get positive results. I think that state of mind, that state of mind, it certainly helps out in other classes. Like for instance, I’m in physics right now, I have to write a paper and I don’t want to, but I know what I have to put into that class to be able to get a good grade out of it. Just like how we have to put in a lot of time and work into rehearsal to get a good performance out of it. In the way I think that state of mind transfers over with band students and being in other classes.

Lee also experienced a direct connection between participating in his activity and his success in academics:

I feel my work ethic has been changed from the dance classes. By taking dance classes, I had to practice dancing, and it made me get up and actually work for it. That transferred into my work for just my other classes, too. I would spend more time studying now. I don’t wait extremely last minute most of the time, but it’s definitely affected my work ethic for studying in general.
Gloria questioned whether or not she would attend her academic classes if not for dance: “I wouldn’t even have the motivation to go to class. Sitting in a room all day and being lectured at would just be horrible. I would probably have skipped class all the time.”

Lee credited dance classes with keeping him from dropping out of college. Lee’s older brother dropped out of college after his fourth year. Lee shared that this was a difficult time for him. Lee and his brother lived together and Lee looked up to his brother as a role model since he was ahead of him in school. He indicated that when his brother dropped out of school he not only lost his role model but since he and his brother had been roommates, he had the extra stress of living alone. Without dance he questioned whether or not he would have dropped out as well: I feel I might have dropped if I hadn’t had the dance classes, if I didn’t have the dance classes to keep me in … The science classes, I mean, they’re interesting, but it wasn’t enough to just keep me there … I would just be like, “Okay, I need a break from school.”

These students acquired resources through friendships to find academic help, and used skills acquired from cocurricular activities to achieve academic success. Mark and Mabel leveraged their friend network for academic help. Jenny and Jorge shared direct transfer of skills obtained in their activity to their academics. Mark and Lee both described how they became aware of their capacity for work through their activity. For Gloria, having dance class helped her continue to attend her other classes, and Lee indicated that he might have dropped out of school without dance class.

**Contentment.** Success and happiness in the moment of participating in their chosen activity was common to all. This contentment was not limited to performances only but to the daily rehearsals as well. This data shows that the act of participation, not necessarily the performances, was the most meaningful to the students.
Table 5
Contentment Quotes by Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Short Contentment Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>“It was such a great moment that I lived and I know it’s something I am never going to forget.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>“I wake up excited to go to ballet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>“Man, I love what we’re doing. This is really fun.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>“I was always happier [after dance class].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>“The feeling I have right now is amazing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>“It was the most incredible experience I’ve ever had, hands down.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>“I feel honored to be a part of this.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Gloria and Brianna were dancers and one took an early morning dance class and the other took her dance class at the end of the day. Although they took their classes at different times of the day, they both articulated how dance shaped their day. Brianna shared:

I wake up excited to go to ballet. If it’s something going towards your future, you should be excited about it and not dreading to wake up. So that’s when I tell people they need to make a change if you’re not happy to wake up to go to class. So I wake up excited to go to ballet, and then it just goes down to my next class. I have a class directly after it and it’s not dance. So I’m still excited. I’m like, “Oh, I just did good in class today. I’m excited to do something. It’s a good day. I made it on time.” Then that just goes into the next class, and I’m all excited to participate and I’m just set for the day.

Gloria had this to say about her afternoon dance class:
Well, it definitely gets me through the day knowing that I can dance at the end of the day. Yeah, I might have to sit in a few classes, and do this work that isn't dance, but I can still, I have the dance to look forward to at the end of the day. It's ... I don't know, it just, rather than being a regular student and waking up, going to class, going home, going to sleep, waking up, going to class, dance pushes me to get through those classes, because if I don't get through those classes I don't graduate.

Jorge still remembered the first time he played the school’s fight song at the end of rehearsal and being so happy he could not play. He also recalled a time that the marching band performed for a stadium full of high school band students and received an incredible standing ovation. He indicated that the large crowd “didn't stop cheering until we left the stadium.” He said that he often “Googles” the performance to experience the emotion of that performance again.

The superordinate theme of this section was success. The participants were all experiencing success academically, as well as in their activities. Furthermore, the participants made sense of their success in their activity by linking it to an internal attribute such as boosting self-confidence or future aspirations.

**Situational Pressure.** Another prominent superordinate theme that the data revealed was pressure. Financial pressure was manifested in a plethora a ways including where the participants attended school, where they lived, and even where they worked. The familial pressure arose from relatives whose support was perceived negatively by the participants because it created stress and pressure for them to complete their degree.

**Finances.** Being low-income was a criterion for participation in this study. It was an everyday lived experience for the participants during the college application process and during
their day-to-day college experience. Money is a resource needed to attend college, and for these participants the lack of this resource greatly influenced where they attended school and their day-to-day experience in school.

*College admissions.* Facing the resource gap in finding a college to attend was a shared experience among all of the participants. Lee, Brianna, and Gloria all lived in a state that provided scholarships for tuition for any of the public colleges or universities in their state. Tuition was paid by the state as long as the student enrolled in the required number of courses and maintained a certain grade point average. As long as the credit hours and grade point average requirements were met, the state funded tuition for eight semesters. Lee shared that “having the [state] scholarship really pointed me to where I’m going to go.” Gloria explained that “out of state was not an option” because of the tuition scholarship awarded to her.

Mark indicated that he would have preferred to go to a college out of state, but with three other brothers in college at the same time it was impossible, “while it [current school] is still a pretty good school, I probably would have chose somewhere else if instate tuition wasn't a factor. Even as an in-state student, without the scholarships he and his brothers received, he indicated that attending college would have been difficult, “if it weren't for those scholarships I don't know if I would be here.”

Jorge not only chose his school based on finances, but he also changed his major to fit the college that provided him with the greatest scholarships:

Before I got any kind of scholarships, I would go straight into how much tuition was, because there are some universities like, “It’s 30,000 a year.” I am like, “That’s never going to happen.” Going back to what my parents do for a living, that’s not possible with how much they make a year. [Current school] is pretty much offering me a full ride and
other schools, not so much.” I knew at [current school], they didn’t offer architecture. I am like, “Let me try civil engineering,” and that’s how I ended up here.

Where each participant attended college shaped all of their college experiences and while college choice can be viewed as an opportunity or a limitation depending on circumstances and perceptions, all seven participants lived through the experience of having limited options as to where to attend college. Additionally, none of the participants reported feeling upset at attending his or her institution.

In college. All of the participants felt stress and pressure in college as well. For all of the participants, a lack of resources added pressure to remain academically successful for fear of losing scholarships that could result in dropping out of school. For some it impacted where they lived or the necessity to work while enrolled as a full-time student.

Jorge, Mabel, and Mark each lived at home or with relatives to save money. Jorge adjusted his attitude towards his daily commute, “Where I live, I commute every day from [home]. Thirty minutes away, without traffic. It's been a hassle but I've managed to live through it and I just do it. I don't complain anymore.”

Jenny and Gloria also adjusted their living situations due to their low-income status. They both became resident assistants on their campus where, in exchange for overseeing the other students in their residence halls, they each received free housing and a meal plan. For Gloria, becoming a resident assistant was the direct result of not having the finances to pay for room, board, and other fees. She explained,

My first year here, my parents had to get a loan to pay for the dorm. I got loans to pay for the meal plan and all those other fees. Now I have a job so I don't have to pay for any of that. I'm a resident assistant on campus. I live in a dorm and then I oversee all the other
residents. I live there and they pay for housing and meal plan and I still get a little bit of a paycheck.

Being a resident assistant and adding a daily commute can be time consuming but other than taking out loans to pay for room and board this was their best option. None of the students complained about living at home or being a resident assistant. It was an accepted reality.

**Familial pressure.** The participants all shared that familial pressure provided great motivation to graduate. For all of the participants there was pressure, either externally from the family or internally because of familial expectations to finish their degree.
Table 6
Pressure Quotes by Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Short Pressure Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>“That's when I felt the pressure…they don't know the hard work that falls behind it. They don't know what it really means to be here and work hard, late nights, no sleep.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>“I feel like I have to just to prove to everybody, not just my family but to the world that I can graduate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>“I don’t know if I would be able to go through with that sort of guilt.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>“Family pressure is a big part, it makes sure I stay on top of my studying.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>“It makes me want to finish because neither of them finished.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>“I feel like I can't fail because if I do, I will severely not only let down my family…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>“I know I have to get it done…my mom put a picture [of a big house] on my bedroom door and she said once you graduate you can buy a house like that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mark shared that his family was so supportive and proud of him that if he did not get his degree it would have negative repercussions:

I was taking this class that I just really wasn’t doing well in. I knew I was going to fail it, so I just sat there and I was like, “Man, I’m, as far as I know, my parents are just incredibly proud of me and if I don’t do well I’ll be letting them down and that’s just, I don’t know if I would be able to go through with that sort of guilt. Because they are proud of us and I would just have felt terrible if I didn’t do well.
Jenny shared that she “just can’t fail” because it would let her family down. Brianna shared that not only was her father proud of her, creating pressure, but she added additional pressure on herself from her desire to be a good example for both her mother and sister:

My dad . . . I don’t know. He acts like I’m his only daughter because . . . I guess because I was the first one to go to college, and he just brags so much. He’s like, “Yep. My baby this and my baby that,” so I feel like I have to graduate. Even if it’s like . . . Right now it’s hard, but I feel like I have to just to prove to everybody, not just my family but to the world that I can graduate and he’s just . . . every good thing I do he just talks about it to his side of the family, and I’m just like, “Oh my God.” He’s so excited. So I don’t want to let him down. You know? I want to be another example for my mom. If she can do it, we can do it together. The same thing for my sister, because she’s always looked up to me. So I’m like, “I have to. I can’t fail. I have to.”

For Jorge, his family was very supportive to the point that Jorge complained that they do not understand how hard he works and that they take that for granted. This created pressure for him:

I have to really work hard and people, some people in my family tell me, “Don’t worry. You got it.” I am like, “Yeah, easier said than done.” That’s when I felt the pressure, because they felt like, “He is in college. He’s done well. He’s got top ten. He got a scholarship. He’s got it,” but they don’t know the hard work that falls behind it. Maybe it’s some sort of ignorance, because they’ve never really gone to college. They don’t know what it really means to be here and work hard, late nights, no sleep, but I think that’s the only type of pressure that I’ve ever gotten, just the fact that everything will be fine, but I’ve got to really push to be fine.
The pressure the participants felt was constant. Gloria indicated that this pressure motivated her to study harder: “It definitely makes me study harder. It makes me want to finish because neither of them finished. Then, I just think about when I graduate, how it will all be worth it.” Lee shared Gloria’s action step of using family pressure to study more as well.

Lee has felt pressure from both his parents and indirectly from his older brother. Lee’s parents put pressure on him all through high school telling him, “You're going to go to college. You're going to become a doctor, and you're going to make money.” Additionally, Lee has an older brother who was on track to be the first in his family with a college degree. However, his brother dropped out after four years of college and has no plans on returning to complete his degree. Once his brother dropped out of college, Lee felt added pressure because his parents perceive him as their only hope to have a college-educated son. Lee shared:

It makes sure I stay on top of my studying. Knowing that my parents didn’t go to college kind of makes it a little harder, because I know a lot of my friends, their parents went to college. They’re [current school] alumni, or they have the experience, and so they have advice more detailed than, “Study hard.” Not having that is kind of like . . . Okay, I need a role model. Then having my brother as my role model, since he was in college a year before me, wasn’t the best thing, because he wasn’t a good student at all. Trying to find someone who can lead me in the right way during college is a little challenging.

These first generation students described how they feel pressure on a daily basis. They related that they coped with the pressure by working hard on their academics.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular
activities describe their college experience. This chapter presented the findings to the primary research question: *How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience?* The findings were presented in two major sections. First, each participant’s case was presented individually in order to present a rich and detailed account of the lived experience of each student. Second, a cross-case analysis was presented that detailed the common themes across the cases that emerged.

Seven participants from three different universities were ultimately interviewed for this research. All seven participants were English-speaking, at-risk college students who participated in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities for more than six hours per week and had a minimum cumulative 3.0 grade point average or higher. To achieve maximum variability both males and females were interviewed and the sample included students who identified themselves as Hispanic (2), African-American (1), Asian (1) and white (3).

The researcher examined and analyzed the data which yielded four superordinate themes:

- Sense of belonging
- Sense of meaning
- Personal growth
- Situational pressure

A sense of belonging was the first major theme that was present for all seven sets of data. All seven participants, by virtue of being first-generation and under-resourced experienced feelings of aloneness. This was true during the application process for school where parents who had not attended college could not or would not offer support. Once at school, participants also experienced being alone as well in communicating with their families and trying to find their fit
in school. All seven participants reported significant positive connections with peers they met through participation in their cocurricular activities as well as with faculty member who led the activities. These relationships appeared to mitigate the prior feeling of aloneness experienced.

All seven participants also experienced a new sense of meaning through participation in their activities. This was most evident through their desire to want to give back after graduating as well as the deep commitment each had with their activity. The participants all spoke about wanting to give back, either to their family, or to society after they graduate. The participants also all showed a deep sense of commitment to their activities as evidenced by the amount of time they each dedicated to participation. All participants spent a minimum of six hours per week in their activity, with the average for all seven being greater than nineteen hours per week.

The third superordinate theme was personal growth. The participants experienced growth both in their activity as well academically. Participants also described a connection between skills developed in their activities to their success in their academic classes. Also common to all of the participants’ success was a deep sense of contentment associated with their activity that also connected to their experience in their academic classes and their overall school experience.

The fourth superordinate theme that the data revealed was pressure. The participants experienced both financial and familial pressure during their college experience. The participants described pressure felt during the college admissions process, as well as their day-to-day college experience. They also described pressure to finish their degree both internally and externally from family members.
Chapter 5 Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate whether participation in arts-based cocurricular activities fosters academic resilience. This is significant due to the very low graduation rates for low-income and first-generation students (Pell Institute, 2011). Participation in cocurricular activities has a profound impact on student retention among first-year college students (Kuh et al., 2007). No other factor has a more significant impact on student persistence than the number of hours spent on cocurricular activities (Kuh et al., 2007). Data have shown that participation in cocurricular activities greatly improves retention; however, little is known as to how or why this is so. This study explored one theory: that participation in cocurricular activities fosters resilience and in turn promotes retention in first-year college students.

Implications for Theory

In this interpretative phenomenological analysis, the primary research question: How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience? was addressed in the single-case narratives and then the cross-case analysis in the previous chapter. The theory-driven research question: To what extent does their experience in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities work as a mechanism to foster resilience? will be addressed in this discussion.

Resilience describes the phenomenon where positive life outcomes happen in spite of past and current risks (Masten, 2001). The study of protective factors is a key to studying resilience (Kumpfer, 2002). There are both internal and external protective factors (Masten, 1994). The five common internal, protective factors include social competence, problem solving, autonomy, spirituality, and a sense of purpose (Benard, 2004). These internal protective factors are developed through interaction with one’s external environment (Benard, 1991;
Kumpfer, 2002; Masten, 2001). Environmental protective factors are those that occur outside of the person, and are also described as the transactional processes between a person and their environment (Kumpfer, 2002). Benard (1991) organized the major environmental protective factors into three domains consisting of (1) caring relationships, (2) high expectations, and (3) meaningful participation. It is the interactional process of all three environmental protective factors with a person’s unique situation that will create a mechanism to foster resilience and positive adaptation (Benard, 2004).

There are two criteria needed to show evidence of resilience: exposure to stress and the successful adaptation despite the stress (Masten & Tellegen, 2012). In this study, the stress was being an at-risk student, and the evidence of successful adaptation was academic success. Below is a brief definition of both at-risk and academic success followed by an examination tying the three environmental protective factors to the themes the data revealed in chapter 4.

**At-risk students and academic resilience.** Academic resilience describes the overcoming of threats to educational development (Wang, et al. 1994). At-risk students are more likely than non-at-risk students to drop out prior to their second year (Pell Institute, 2011). Both low-income and first-generation have shaped much of the literature on college persistence (Ishitani, 2003; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Novotny, 2011) and are the criteria used by the federal government since 1965 for eligibility in the TRIO programs that funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to low-income and first-generation students.

The main criteria in the literature to assess whether an at-risk student has fostered resilience include persistence from freshman to sophomore year and academic achievement (Bulger & Watson, 2006; Chen, 2012; Herzog, 2005; Tinto, 1975). The participants had to meet
both criteria of high grade point average (3.0 or greater) and persistence past their freshmen year in order to participate in this study.

The theory-driven research question for this study was: To what extent does their experience in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities work as a mechanism to foster resilience? In the following sub-sections an analysis of the students’ experience with the external protective factors and how they fostered resilience is presented. All three external factors work synergistically with each student’s internal factors to foster resilience. Although presented separately, each of the external factors must be viewed as a factor working interdependently with the other factors; therefore, some overlap between experiences may be presented.

Table 7
External Protective Factors with Corroborating Data Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caring Relationship</th>
<th>High Expectations</th>
<th>Meaningful participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer connections</td>
<td>Academic success</td>
<td>Contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty connections</td>
<td>Success in activity</td>
<td>Passion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Situational/Family pressure</td>
<td>Altruism</td>
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Caring relationships and connections with peers and faculty. Resilience theorists identified caring relationships as an environmental factor that can foster resilience in at-risk students. In this study, the superordinate theme of sense of belonging and specifically the subordinate themes of peer connections and faculty connections were consistent with the resilience literature. There is a great deal of literature regarding the importance of relationships with both non-parent adults and peers in fostering resilience (Benard, 2004). In the college setting, peer-to-peer relationships that are formed in the shared experience of the participants’ activity have been shown to benefit academic success. These relationships not only help a
student find their “fit” within a college, peers provide a safe and trustworthy support mechanism for when academics become difficult (Benard, 2004). Mabel shared that having so many friends through her participation in band gives her a built-in study group for each class:

I do see them in calculus and physics and stuff like that. Having to know those people, you know people to study with. That helps you get along because you know more people. You can study with them, you could do homework, you can relate to each other.

Mark indicated he and his friends know who is good in different classes and they rely on each other’s strengths to study: “There’s a kid in our physics class who is a percussionist and he just does really well, so we like to get his help whenever we are studying for exams or whatever.”

The quotes from the participants provided a glimpse into how comfortable they felt with their peers from their activities. Perhaps this comfort level reduced stress when facing academic distress and allowed the participants to ask friends for academic help. Most students who take advantage of a college-sponsored tutoring service do so because it is a required component of a certain class, not of their own volition (Martorell & McFarlin, 2011). This suggests that students may not feel comfortable going to a service provided by peers or adults that they do not know, and that having a close connection with peers may be beneficial academically for students when in need of academic help.

The literature revealed that the most salient protective factor across decades of research is that of a caring relationship between an adult and young person (Masten, et al., 1990; Benard, 1995, 2004; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). The data confirmed this with each participant sharing that they have a strong relationship with a faculty member in their activity. Jenny referred to her choir director as her “second mom.” Lee indicated that he wanted to remain close to one of his dance teachers after graduation. A remarkable example of a faculty connection was
the relationship that Mabel described that she experienced with her private music teacher. Mabel was admitted to the university’s behavioral health unit against her will. She described to her teacher that she had a break from reality and had to go away for a while. Her teacher told her to call him everyday. She was able to call his cell phone everyday he assured her that she would be all right. Mabel indicated that, “I don’t think I’d be alive now, because of [if not for] my relationship with him.”

The resilience theory literature reveals that caring relationships are a protective factor that can foster resilience in at-risk students (Masten, et al., 1990; Benard, 1995, 2004; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). The data collected in this study confirms that caring relationships with both peers and non-parent adults through participation in cocurricular activities are a protective factor that may promote resilience.

**High expectations and academic success/success in activity.** The resilience literature shows that high expectations are an environmental protective factor that can foster resilience, and the data revealed in chapter 4 is also in line with the literature as it relates to the subordinate themes of academic success and success in activity. Participation in a cocurricular activity requires expectations for participation (Peck et al., 2008). These expectations may become social norms for participants and transfer to other areas of the participants’ lives, such as academics. All seven participants articulated how the hard work and high expectations in their cocurricular activity transferred to their academic lives. All seven participants are academically successful as evidenced by their high grade point averages and continued persistence in college. When discussing academics with Lee he shared that:

I feel my work ethic has been changed from the dance classes. I had to practice dancing, and it made me get up and actually work for it. That transferred into my work for my
other classes, too. I would spend more time studying now. I don’t wait extremely last minute most of the time, but it’s definitely affected my work ethic for studying in general.

Mark shared that this transfer of skills helps him with assignments that he does not want to do, knowing how much work he will need to put in reduces stress and anxiety regarding the assignment. Mark explained his approach to academics:

I’m in physics right now. I have to write a paper and I don’t want to, but I know what I have to put into that class to be able to get a good grade out of it. Just like how we have to put in a lot of time and work into rehearsal to get a good performance out of it. In the way I think that state of mind transfers over with band students and being in other classes.

Jenny explained that the skills that she has developed from being in choir not only transferred to her other academics but also to her job as a resident assistant:

Never be late to rehearsal, always have everything prepared beforehand, be organized, don’t lose stuff. That all applies to the professional world. I’m a Resident Assistant in the dorms and because I’ve grown up in choir, you’re always 5 minutes early, you always have all your paperwork done way before you get there, and you learn how to communicate with people effectively. The self-discipline that music teaches you, definitely helps you out in those general ed courses.

The head of the dance program at the school attended by the three participating dancers shared some of the expectations placed on them. Dance students have expectations for how they wear their hair, and it may change from a “high and tight bun” for ballet to “pulled back and out of your face” for a modern dance class. There is an expectation that all students are early:
“Never interrupt a class that has already begun.” In fact, if a dancer is late to rehearsal, they must wait to be recognized by the dance professor and ask permission to join the class. Discussions also take place regarding what to eat and drink prior to and after a dance class. From speaking with the three dancers and with the professor of dance, it is clear that taking a one-hour dance class is a much bigger commitment than it appears from the registration catalogue.

One form of high expectations not found in the resilience literature, but that was revealed in the data, is pressure from internally-imposed high expectations to please family. The data presented in chapter 4 revealed high expectations that the participants placed on themselves due to familial pressure to graduate. Mark indicated that he “would not be able to go through that sort of guilt” he would feel if he were not to graduate. Jenny described that she would “severely” let down her family if she failed to graduate. And Lee shared that “Family pressure is great; it makes sure I stay on top of my studying.” Although pressure is an internal characteristic, it was promoted by the external factor of high expectations experienced from family members. The resilience literature reveals it is the interactional process of all three protective factors working with a person’s unique situation that will create a balance to foster resilience and positive adaptation (Benard, 2004). Benard (2004) warns that a failure to achieve balance can result in negative outcomes. Although the participants in this research have succeeded under the pressure they are experiencing from family members, their descriptions of the pressure they feel indicates this delicate balance.

Whether it was a direct transfer of skills needed for an academic project such as in Mark’s situation or the cultural norms developed through participation in these activities that the three dance students and Jenny experienced, the high expectations placed on the seven
participants through their participation in their chosen activity had a positive academic effect. These examples are explicit in nature; the students who could connect their experiences with high expectations in their activity to actions in academic classes did so. There may also be an inherent action in the students who, through their chosen activity, understand not to be late or not to interrupt a class already in session. It may be such an ingrained part of their norm that they would not even think to bring it up as something that is different for them compared to other students in their core academic classes.

**Meaningful participation and sense of meaning/personal growth/altruism.** Meaningful participation is also identified as a protective factor in the resilience literature. According to Benard (1995), participation is a “fundamental human need” (p. 4). Participation can help a student find his or her fit or place in college and this fit positively affects college retention (Raley, 2007; Braxton et al., 1988). Other studies have shown that some non-academically successful students stay in school because of this fit (Kennedy et al., 2000).

In this study, the subordinate themes of passion, success in activity, contentment, and to some extent altruism were consistent with the resilience literature regarding meaningful participation. Benard (2002) posits that group activities, mastery experiences, and creative expression, are key components of meaningful participation and argues that students “need experiences that allow them to be good at something” (p. 25).

All of the cocurricular activities that they were in were performance-based activities that required the development and refinement of skills. This skill development and refinement process is one where goals are set, rehearsal strategies are implemented, strategies are executed in performance, and then as skills increase so to do the goals and the process continues (Mahoney, et al., 2003). All seven participants shared that their most meaningful experience in
college was related to their activity. Some students fondly remember great performance experiences, some remember a trip that grew the bond with other students, and for some attending the regular class of their activity was a meaningful experience that gets them through their day. For Gloria, she auditioned for the school musical and was offered a role in the production as a dancer. She had never been in a Broadway musical prior to this. Lee was given the opportunity to compose a dance for the end-of-year dance show. He described that thinking as a teacher and composer rather than just a dancer had a profound effect on him. Brianna was able to study abroad in Taiwan, taking dance and culture classes with other members of her dance program. For Mark there was a personal experience of winning a spot in the honors recital at the end of the year and he also fondly remembers the NFL game at which his school’s marching band performed. Jenny took a group that she cofounded and performed at an Alzheimer’s care unit. Mabel won a concerto competition and performed with the local orchestra. She was also asked to teach for the professor when he was late or needed to miss rehearsal. Jorge still remembered the first time he played the school’s fight song at the end of rehearsal and being so happy he could not play. He also recalled a time that the marching band performed for a stadium full of high school band students and received an incredible standing ovation.

Both Gloria and Brianna were dancers and one took an early morning dance class and the other her dance class at the end of the day. It was interesting that they both articulated how taking their class at that time of day helped them get through their day. Brianna shared:

I wake up excited to go to ballet, and most people . . . I always try to push this on people, that you should wake up excited to go to class, even though most people aren’t. If it’s something going towards your future, you should be excited about it and not dreading to
wake up. So that’s when I tell people they need to make a change if you’re not happy to wake up to go to class. So I wake up excited to go to ballet, and then it just goes down to my next class. I have a class directly after it and it’s not dance. So I’m still excited. I’m like, “Oh, I just did good in class today. I’m excited to do something. It’s a good day. I made it on time.” Then that just goes into the next class, and I’m all excited to participate and I’m just set for the day.

Gloria had this to say about her afternoon dance class:

It definitely gets me through the day knowing that I can dance at the end of the day.

Yeah, I might have to sit in a few classes, and do this work that isn’t dance, but I can still, I have the dance to look forward to at the end of the day.

One cannot be academically successful if one drops out of school. Lee’s older brother dropped out of college after his fourth year. This was a difficult time for Lee and without dance he questioned whether or not he would have dropped out as well:

I feel I might have dropped if I hadn’t had the dance classes, if I didn’t have the dance classes to keep me in . . . The science classes, I mean, they’re interesting, but it wasn’t enough to just keep me there . . . I would just be like, “Okay, I need a break from school.”

Gloria questioned whether or not she would have attended her core academic classes if not for dance, “I wouldn’t even have the motivation to go to class. Sitting in a room all day and being lectured at would just be horrible. I would probably have skipped class all the time.”

All seven participants spent a minimum of six hours per week in their chosen activity. Five of the seven participants spent up to thirty hours per week in their chosen activity and two of the seven spent thirty or more hours per week in their activity. The connection between number of hours spent in a cocurricular activity and its positive affect on student persistence is
well-documented, and spending twenty hours or more per week has the most positive impact on college persistence (Kuh, et al., 2007). Although the participants spent many hours per week in their activity, not one participant shared that this time away from their core academics was an impediment to their academic success. On the contrary, all of the participants described how meaningful relationships, high expectations, meaningful participation, or various combinations of all three actually had a positive effect on their academics. For some it was finding study partners through their relationships, for others it was a transfer of skills developed in rehearsals to academics that was the benefit, and for some, being a part of a meaningful activity made them more content with their college experience.

Altruism was a subordinate theme revealed by the data and is also discussed in the resilience theory literature. Benard (2002) argues that service can be used as a tool in the classroom to help students foster resilience. These approaches include peer tutoring, peer helping, and community service (Benard, 2002). However, these are planned approaches by the teacher or instructor of the class, not an internal-desire to give back. Dolan (2012), posited that altruistic acts can foster resilience in young people as well. His argument however is in the context of finding meaningful civic engagement in youth to foster resilience. Both Benard (2002) and Dolan (2012) approach altruism as an educational tool to be planned and implemented by a teacher or organization. However, the context in which the participants in this study revealed their altruism is different from that found in the resilience literature.

The participants in this study all mentioned wanting to give back in different ways. Jorge, Brianna, Gloria, and Mabel all spoke about giving back to their families. They spoke of quality of life issues, having money, and providing things needed for their current as well as future family. Jenny, Mark, and Lee all spoke about giving back to society in general. Brianna changed
her college major so she can work with children who have movement issues. Jenny wants to continue to perform for Alzheimer patients in her community describing the feeling of making a difference with the patients as “the most incredible experience.” Jorge shared that no matter where he moves after graduation he will always find a church where he can help the music director. Although mentioned in the literature, altruism is not currently viewed as a protective factor. However, the desire to give back after successfully obtaining a college degree was very strong in all seven participants. The connection between at-risk college students and their desire to better themselves so that they can provide for others should be explored in future as an internal protective factor.

**Implications for Research**

The literature review in chapter two contained three major strands as related to this research: the significance and value of a college degree, retention and attrition issues for college students, and resilience theory. Resilience theory was discussed in the preceding section as it relates to implications for theory. What follows is a discussion regarding how the findings of this current research are consistent or not consistent with what is currently known regarding retention and attrition issues in higher education.

Currently less than 60% of college students graduate college within six years of matriculation (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and only 11% of low-income, first generation students obtain a bachelor’s degree within that same time frame (Pell Institute, 2011). High attrition rates are not a new phenomenon with the issue being addressed as early 1890 (Hunter & Murray, 2007). Two seminal theories that address the causes and cures of college retention are Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory (1975), and Astin’s Theory of Involvement (1984). Tinto (1975) argued that the greater degree of social integration, the greater the level of
commitment to the university. Astin (1985) echoes this belief by stating that the more involved a student is with their college, the greater the likelihood that the student will graduate. Among the traits that Astin (1985) uses to define an involved student include: one who spends much time on campus, participates actively in organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. This current research is consistent with the arguments made by Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975). Although Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975) mention cocurricular activities, their work was not focused on them like the current research.

The data presented in chapter four revealed that all of the participants spent a great deal of time on campus. Collectively, the seven participants spend an average of more than 19 hours per week in their activity. By virtue of the time spent in their cocurricular activity, the participants are consistent with all the traits presented by Astin (1985); they are spending much of their time on campus, in an organization where they interact frequently with faculty members and other students.

Other educational scholars have contributed to the discussion of retention and persistence. Kennedy et al. (2000) posit that some students persist despite “contrary predictions because their successful social integration and feelings of fit” (p. 1). Contentment was a theme that was present in the data for all seven participants. Each participant had friends from their activities and all mentioned positive relationships with their teachers. One could argue that the participants have integrated socially and found their “fit” through their activity. However, both Gloria and Lee actually spoke about their experience of skipping class or dropping out of school had it not been for their “fit” with their activity. Gloria indicated that she “wouldn’t even have the motivation to go to [academic] class” if it were not for the fact that she was able to end each class day with a dance class. When reflecting on a difficult time that he was going through, Lee
shared that “I feel I might have dropped if I hadn’t had the dance classes, if I didn’t have the
dance classes to keep me in.”

This research has attempted to fill three gaps in the literature. First, this research
attempted to answer the call for more research pertaining to academic resilience with there being
“relatively little work into academic resilience” (Martin & Marsh, 2009). Second, although
previous research has been conducted on persistence through the lens of resilience (Hartley,
2010; Khademi & Aghdam, 2013; Martin & Marsh, 2009; McIntyre et al.; Morales, 2008), none
has been found yet that studies how cocurricular participation may or may not act as a
mechanism to foster resilience in at-risk college students. This research made an attempt to
answer that gap as well. And, third, there has been disproportionate amount of research over the
decades conducted on the individual and the family protective factors to the exclusion of the
environmental factors (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). This research attempted to exploit this gap as
well.

**Implications for Practice**

Understanding how cocurricular activities foster resilience would be of great value to
many constituencies. Student affairs professionals would be able to initiate more cocurricular
activities that incorporate the factors that are deemed to have the greatest effect on fostering
resilience and student persistence. Existing cocurricular activities could incorporate proven
successful factors in their programs thus making them more effective at fostering resilience and
student persistence. Additionally, parents and high school counselors could encourage their
children towards cocurricular activities that exhibit the factors inherent in activities that have
been shown to have a positive effect on fostering resilience and student persistence.
Parents and high school counselors. With more than one-quarter of all college freshmen dropping out of college prior to their second year (ACT, 2012), different strategies must be employed to reverse this trend. Students who have participated in arts-related activities throughout high school should be encouraged to continue to do so while in college.

A survey of more than 1.6 million high school students who took the ACT in 2012 showed that only about a third of students who participated in extracurricular activities in high school planned to do so in college (ACT, 2013). The common argument presented for not participating in cocurricular activities as a freshman is that due to receiving some sort of financial aid (that has a GPA minimum requirement), the student needs to focus solely on his or her academics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Kena, et al., 2015), 85% of all college freshmen at four-year degree granting institutions receive some sort of financial aid. Therefore, most college freshmen are on financial aid and all aid is tied to a certain GPA. Rather than message to the matriculating freshman to not participate in an activity that the data shows has a positive impact on both academic resilience and college persistence, parents and high school counselors should support high school students continued participation in activities that the student enjoyed in high school.

The literature on resilience and retention as well as the data presented in this study should provide ample evidence for parents and counselors to change their rhetoric regarding college freshmen participating in cocurricular activities. All of the participants in this study attended larger universities with more than 20,000 students each. Participating in their activity in college provided them with their “fit” on campus. That fit provided the external protective factors of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation that might not otherwise have happened. If the messaging can improve on the high school end of the spectrum, the next
step is to educate the key players on the college side of the spectrum. These include both the faculty who lead these programs as well as the organizations on campuses who are tasked with supporting at-risk students.

**Student Affairs.** Student Affairs divisions are usually the office that organizes student organizations on campus. While student-led groups were not a part of this study, based on the data, conversations should be had with student affairs professionals discussing the factors that lead to resilience. Even though a student-led group may not be faculty led, there is no reason why these groups cannot explicitly work to foster resilience. Additionally, most student-run groups are required to have a faculty advisor. Bringing these advisers into the conversation as well could be of benefit. I propose that student affairs offices use these findings from this study to enhance an already robust offering of student organizations.

**New student orientations.** Most colleges host orientations for new students and their families each summer (Boening & Miller, 2005). To reinforce the recommendations for high school counselors and parents to encourage students to continue to stay involved in their activity in college, the university too should address this at their new student orientations. These orientations are held to help students and families make a successful transition to the college experience (Hollins, 2009). Reinforcing the message that the data shows that the more engaged the student is on-campus, the greater the likelihood of academic success. These orientations are a great opportunity for the university to explicitly recommend to all parents and new students that all students who participated in meaningful activity should continue in that activity on their new campus. If students were not involved in any activity in high school, the university can promote all of the organizations that their campus offers for a student to become involved.
**Training teachers how to exploit protective factors.** Although the literature on resilience and academic success as well as the data presented in this study show that participation in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities can foster resilience and therefore lead to academic success, most faculty are not aware of this super power that they possess. All faculty who are in a position to lead arts-based, campus-wide cocurricular activities should be trained to learn to identify why what they are doing is so valuable and how it can change students’ lives. Their activities can provide external protective factors and if they learn how to exploit those factors they may have an even greater impact on their students.

Many college leaders understand that there is something about their program that is “magical” and special but it is implicit and they may attribute the program’s success to their personal knowledge and greatness. Other college leaders understand this more explicitly and set up systems to exploit these protective factors. It is not uncommon for large university band programs to offer peer tutoring to freshmen from upperclassmen. To widen peer groups, many large band programs set up big brother and sister programs where underclassmen are paired up with upperclassman. The goal of these programs is not only to make the freshman feel welcome as part of the program but also as part of the larger university community. Also, music, band, dance, and theater programs all have national fraternities and/or sororities. These can provide even more protective factors for students who want to involve themselves deeper with their chosen activity. Although the above listed best practices and programs help develop protective factors that may foster resilience, it is necessary for the educational leaders to understand why these best practices work and how they work as a mechanism to foster resilience.

**The dark side.** Time spent in activity is one of the catalysts to create meaningful relationships with both peers and adults. However, the incidents of inappropriate relations
between teachers and students are troubling and some are calling it an epidemic (Ratliff & Watson, 2014). A study that looked into common characteristics of educators who have had sexual relations with students found that the number one common characteristic was teachers who had the greatest contact time with students and the authors of the paper mentioned music teachers specifically in their findings (Ratliff & Watson, 2014).

There is no excuse ethically or legally for an adult educator to ever betray the trust of a student even if the student shows interest. It could be that the caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation in an activity are filling a void in a student and the student is confused by these new positive emotions. It is understandable for a young student to experience emotions and perhaps feel a sense of attachment. However, it is despicable for an educator to take advantage of these feelings. If teachers understood how resilience is fostered and that it truly is not about them but the effects of their program, perhaps we would see less of these disturbing stories reported.

**Student support services.** Seven universities were contacted regarding this research. Gatekeepers from arts-based activities including band directors, choral directors, dance instructors, theater professors, and orchestra directors were contacted. Also, student services that are designed and funded to help at-risk college students such as Student Support Services (part of the federally funded TRIO programs) were also contacted. From the experience of this one study, one observation is that while tremendous resources are being allocated to help at-risk college students through specific programs, these programs operate within a silo with little to no interaction with some of the traditional programs on campus that may benefit the very populations they were created to serve. It is hoped that this research (and more like it to follow) can help bridge the gap between the programs on campus designed specifically to serve at-risk
students and programs that may not be recognized as being effective in helping these students thrive.

If cocurricular activities can foster resilience in students, then it would behoove all leaders of these activities to understand what it is that they are implicitly doing through their activity that fosters resilience. Only by bridging the gap between the services created to assist at-risk students and any campus program that may already be fostering resilience in students can this conversation begin. The arts-based cocurricular activity leaders may be in a better position than almost anyone else on campus to have a positive effect on at-risk students. Until they understand this advantage, it is only through implicit actions that positive outcomes for at-risk students are being achieved. It is hoped that through more research and more education, the leaders of arts-based cocurricular activities can make this an explicit part of their teaching.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Every study has limitations and this study is no exception. While every effort was made to make the current research as rigorous as possible, there were limitations and ways to build upon this study in the future. This study used grade point average as well as persistence beyond the freshman year of college to define success. This was done so that the freshman year experience would be easier to remember and also to enable recruitment of participants through the college gatekeepers. Although the data show that retention beyond the freshman year as well as a higher grade point average are strong indicators that a student will persist to graduate, a limitation of this study is that we do not know for certain if these students will persist to graduate. Future research can look for at-risk college graduates who participated in adult-led cocurricular activities. Identifying these students may be more difficult and memories of their lived experiences during their early years in college may not be as fresh, but in this instance,
there would be no doubt that the students were academically successful, due to their completed degree from a four-year college.

The sample size of this study is in line with the recommendations of interpretative phenomenological analysis best practices. The number also allowed the researcher to reveal as much as possible about each participant’s lived experience, whereas a larger number may have overwhelmed this current study. However, there was a difference between the lived experience of the participants who were in an activity that had the same teacher across all of the years of participation (same band director, same private music teacher, etc.) and those whose teachers changed (ballet teacher, modern dance teacher, etc.). The difference in this study was between the participants who were in music activities and those who were in dance activities. This diversity in activities fit the current study well, but brought up more questions regarding type of arts-based cocurricular activity that should be further explored in future research. Another recommendation based on the current sample size would be for additional similar research to be conducted to see if the findings are consistent across researchers.

The scope of this study was limited to faculty-led, arts-based cocurricular activities. This filled a gap in the literature where no research found to date had linked faculty-led, arts-based cocurricular activities directly to academic resilience. This also was to keep the size of the study manageable as well as leverage the author’s background in arts education. However, this does not imply that only arts-based activities, or faculty-led activities can foster resilience. Many other activities should be studied to find as many different mechanisms to foster resilience. These activities could include sports, religious student groups, ethnic student groups, student government and any organized group on a campus that may be able to foster resilience.
Lastly given the proper resources, future research should include a longitudinal study with a larger number of participants. Interviewing participants prior to their college matriculation, with follow-ups at the end of each college year with the final one coming after college graduation would provide the freshest data. A larger pool of participants would be needed in case of attrition, but how incredible would it be to have too many participants finish the study due to cocurricular activities truly being factories for building resilience.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how seven at-risk college students who attend a public four-year college and who participate in faculty led arts-based cocurricular activities describe their college experience. The primary research question: *How do seven at-risk college students who are engaged in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities describe their college experience?* led to much data that answered the theory-driven research question: *To what extent does their experience in faculty-led performing arts cocurricular activities work as a mechanism to foster resilience?* It is hoped that this study fills a gap in the literature in regards to the relationships between faculty-led arts-based cocurricular activities and academic resilience. It is also hoped that this study will inspire further study as well as add to the best practices to help at-risk students not only enter into college, but to thrive, and eventually graduate from college.
References


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Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., & Gonyea, R. M. (2007). *Connecting the dots: Multi-faceted analyses of the relationships between student engagement results from the NSSE, and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success*. 
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## APPENDIX A

### KEY DEFINITIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition in own words</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Author, year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Buoyancy</td>
<td>Academic buoyancy is overcoming minor adversity (day-to-day challenges and difficulties associated with attending school) that are experienced at some level by all students at some time(s). Buoyancy is a precursor to resiliency.</td>
<td>The student was experiencing stress in one of her classes and took control of the situation by receiving additional help from the student resource center as well as from the professor to regain control of the situation and to build confidence thus enhancing her academic buoyancy.</td>
<td>Martin, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk student</td>
<td>A student whose background experiences, intrapersonal character, interpersonal character, and/or environmental factors that can lead to negative academic outcomes. “Students who have a greater probability of academic failure due to adverse circumstances”.</td>
<td>Due to the student’s low self-efficacy, shyness, and previous low academic performance, he is at-risk of not achieving satisfactory grades during his first year at college.</td>
<td>Chen, R., 2012; Bulger &amp; Watson, 2006; Cavazos, Johnson, Cavazos, Castro &amp; Vela, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Adaptation to a successful developmental level for that person’s age, based on expectations on that person’s culture or society. Or levels of achievement in specific areas such as academics or sports.</td>
<td>Through diligent studying, the student became competent in the subject matter.</td>
<td>Masten &amp; Coatsworth, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocurricular</td>
<td>Single domain structured activities that meet regularly and are outside of the regular curriculum yet are sponsored, sanctioned, or supported by the school Synonymous with extracurricular.</td>
<td>The student participated in the school’s marching that provided her with her cocurricular activity.</td>
<td>Gardner, Browning, &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2012; Mahoney, Cairns, &amp; Farmer, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular</td>
<td>Single domain structured activities that meet regularly and are outside of the regular curriculum</td>
<td>The student participated in the school’s marching that provided her with her cocurricular activity.</td>
<td>Gardner, Browning, &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2012; Mahoney, Cairns, &amp; Farmer, 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
yet are sponsored, sanctioned, or supported by the school. Synonymous with cocurricular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protective factors</td>
<td>Attributes that contribute to positive outcomes</td>
<td>Benard (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Resilience describes the phenomenon where positive life outcomes happen in spite of past and current risks to those positive outcomes.</td>
<td>Masten, 2001; Chaskin, 2008; Luthar, Cicchetti, &amp; Becker, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Academic resilience is overcoming major threats to educational development.</td>
<td>Martin, 2013; Wang, Haertel &amp; Walberg, 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk factor</td>
<td>Any part of the individual or environment and the interaction between the two that can contribute to negative outcomes.</td>
<td>Hartley, 2010,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>Vulnerability describes a state in which people may experience negative life outcomes due to being exposed to risk factors such as living in poverty,</td>
<td>Werner, 1993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

CONTEXTS THAT FOSTER RESILIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Internal Context</th>
<th>External Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaskin (2008)</td>
<td>Human capital</td>
<td>Social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumpfer (1999)</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friborg, Barlaug, Martinussen, Rosenvinge, &amp; Hjemdal (2005)</td>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon &amp; Song, 1994</td>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td>Environmental characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard, Dryden, &amp; Johnson, 1999</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masten, 2001</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community resources and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Focus Areas</td>
<td>Emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMillan and Reed (1994)</td>
<td>Personal attributes, Family life, School and classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novotny, 2011</td>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td>Surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodes &amp; Lowe, 2008</td>
<td>Individual, Family</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutter (1979)</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner (2013)</td>
<td>Individual, Family</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner &amp; Smith (1992, 2001)</td>
<td>Individual, Family</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX C

## RISK FACTORS, PROTECTIVE FACTORS, ADAPTATION CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year/Journal</th>
<th>Risk factors</th>
<th>Protective factors (assets)</th>
<th>Adaptation Criteria (Masten)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alva, 1991</td>
<td>Mexican-American 10th graders (low SES, being ethnic, lack of learning materials in the home, educational and occupational attainment of parents)</td>
<td>Personal resources (academic accountability, self concept of intellect and social status)</td>
<td>Adaptive outcomes as the evidence resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Journal Of Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>Mentors; Very important nonparental adults (VIPs)</td>
<td>Environmental resources (support from friends, teachers, and parents)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beardslee, 1989</td>
<td>Southern Civil Rights workers; Survivors of childhood cancer; Children of parents with an affective disorder</td>
<td>Adequate cognitive appraisal; Realistic appraisal of the capacity for and consequences of action; action; developmental perspective; understanding as a protective factor;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</td>
<td>Native American High School Students; Low SES; Long commute to school (20-30 miles); felt judged (negatively) by white culture</td>
<td>School; Extra-curricular participation; Role model (most from immediate family); Extended family; Valued education</td>
<td>Graduated high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, &amp; Baartman, 2009</td>
<td>Minority (Hispanic &amp; African-American) low-income students; Behavior issues (suspended; alcohol use; marijuana use; arrested);</td>
<td>Home background (Living with both parents; parents have postsecondary education; parents employed; parents expectations of finishing a college)</td>
<td>On time High school graduation; GPA above a “C”; standardized math and reading scores above the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior school experience (attended nursery or preschool; fewer school changes; not retained one or more grades); Engagement behaviors (going to class on time; participating in class work; completing homework; not being disruptive in class);

Freeman, Stoch, Chan, & Hutchinson, 2004. Learning disability

Intrapersonal: personal academic goals; Interpersonal: fond memories of peers; Institutional: structured activities;

Alberta Journal Of Educational Research

Garmezy, 1971. Children of parents with schizophrenia

Graduated high school

Learning disability

Freeman, Stoch, Chan, & Hutchinson, 2004.

Intrapersonal: personal academic goals; Interpersonal: fond memories of peers; Institutional: structured activities;

Parental support; extra-curricular activities;

American Journal of Orthopsychiatry


Children of parents with schizophrenia

Garmezy, 1991 Children born/raised in poverty

Temperament (intrapersonal); family (intrapersonal); external support (community);

American Behavioral Scientist.

Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984

Students stressor based on: Teacher ratings, peer assessments, and school record data assessed competence

Child Development

Hartley, 2010 Students with psychiatric disabilities

Active coping; peer support; counseling;

American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation

College risk factors (for all students) include: academic pressure and competition; less academic support than academic support; academic accommodations;

Students with psychiatric disabilities

American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation

include: academic pressure and competition; less academic support than academic support; academic accommodations;

High school; less accessible teachers compared with high school teachers and counselors; culture of alcohol and drugs; financial debt pressure.
Additional risk for psychiatric students include: cognitive impairment, social stigma; poor academic self-confidence; peer relationships;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Topic Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Howard &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Children (9-12) who live in very low SES, high government assistance; adverse family conditions (parent suicide, parental drug use; parent unemployment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khademi &amp; Aghdam</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Homesickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedia-Social and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodmer, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>Latino students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First generation college students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attended low performing high schools;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>began college at a community college;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>all had financial obligations outside of school; were exposed to violence and gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology In The</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptive: self-efficacy, valuing of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>school, mastery orientation, persistence, planning, and study management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McIntyre, Heron,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children of divorced parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMillan &amp; Reed,</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Eligible for free and reduced price lunch; dysfunctional family (includes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal, family, and school as furthered defined as: Early Intervention, School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant at-risk students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
both single and dual parent homes; low socioeconomic status; retained once; retained twice; poor attendance; behavior problems; low academic performance; health problems; suspended from school; substance abuse; trouble with the law; receiving special education services; disrespectful of authority; difficulty with interpersonal relations/peer interactions.

Miller, 2002 Learning disability
Identifiable success; areas of strength; self-determination; specific turning point; positive peer relationships; encouraging teacher; acknowledgement of disability; discussed extracurricular activities; Academic success (B+ average or higher)

Morales, 2008 Hispanic (Dominican American); grew up in urban household; neither parent attended college; low SES; neither parent had job above non- or low-skilled worker
Strong internal locus of control; viewed school as a positive anchor in life; high self-confidence; strong work-ethic; education a priority for parents; important others (sister, uncle, pastor, etc.); Completed 30 credits at elite university (therefore persisted past freshman year); had minimum GPA of 3.0

Self-organization strategies (self-evaluation, organizing and transforming, goal-setting and planning, seeking information, keeping records and monitoring, environmental structuring, self- consequences, rehearsing and memorizing, seeking peer assistance, seeking teacher assistance, seeking adult assistance, reviewing tests, reviewing notes, reviewing texts (p. 199)

Orr, & Goodman, 2010 Learning Disabilities; self-reported that she/he had a diagnosed and documented Interpersonal; extracurricular activities; Persisted into and through higher education
| Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research | Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009 | Latino | Parental valuing of school; significantly higher extracurricular participation; significantly higher volunteerism | Academic success (high GPA, high number of academic awards, and high number of academically rigorous Honors and AP courses) |
| Hispanic Journal Of Behavioral Sciences | Rhodes & Lowe, 2008 | Mentoring |

**Child Care In Practice**

| Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong, & Gilgun, 2007 | Youth (12-23) who experienced at least three of the following: poverty, war, social dislocation, cultural disintegration or genocide, violence, marginalization, drug and alcohol addictions, family breakdown, mental illness of the child or parent, and early pregnancy. | Access to material resources; relationships; identity; power and control; cultural adherence; social justice; cohesion | Youth who were identified as “coping well with adversity” by a research team member or a local advisory committee |

**Adolescence**

| Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1997 | Latino middle school youth | 75th percentile on 2 years of a standardized group math test and 2 years of self-reported math grades as "As" and "Bs" |

**Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001**

| Exposure to at least four of the following: perinatal stress; chronic poverty; chronic discord and parental psychopathology (alcoholism, mental illness). | Intrapersonal: Internal locus of control; Interpersonal: close friends, favorite teacher (mentor); community; extracurricular activities | Competent, caring young adults. |
APPENDIX D

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Are you first generation student and Pell grant recipient who participates in a cocurricular activity for more than six hours per week?

If so, consider taking part in this study!

A study is being conducted to gain insight into first generation college student’s experiences in cocurricular activities.

In order to participate you must meet the following criteria:

- College sophomore, junior, or senior, enrolled in the same college where matriculated.
- Must be a Pell grant recipient.
- Must be a first generation student.
- Must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- Must spend 6+ hours per week participating in a cocurricular or extra-curricular activity.

All qualified individuals are encouraged to apply, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, religion, (dis)ability, or national origin.

The study consists of two interviews. The first interview focuses on the participant’s life history and present day experience in relation to the topic (between 60-90 minutes); the second interview will allow the participant to reflect upon the meaning of the experiences and to clarify or expound on information from the first interview (approximately 60 minutes).

If you or someone you know would like to participate in this study or learn more, please email parks.chr@husky.neu.edu or call 617-872-2404. Additionally, interested participants should fill out an online application (completing application will take less than 5 minutes). Selection for the study is not guaranteed, but will be determined based on the information collected on the web form.

Confidentiality is guaranteed, and participants’ names will never be shared with others or used in the published results.

The principal investigator for this study is Dr. Tova Sanders, concentration lead for Organizational Leadership Studies at Northeastern University, and the student investigator is Chris Parks, an EdD doctoral candidate at Northeastern University. This study has been approved by Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board for research ethics (IRB# CPS15-01-07).
APPENDIX E

WEB FORM APPLICATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Application for Participation

Are you a first generation student and Pell grant recipient who participates in a staff or faculty led performing art cocurricular activity for more than six hours per week?

If so, consider taking part in this study!

A study is being conducted to gain insight into at-risk first generation college student’s experiences in cocurricular activities.

In order to participate you must meet the following criteria:

• College sophomore, junior, or senior, enrolled in the same college where matriculated.
• Must be a Pell grant recipient
• Must be a first generation student (neither parent has obtained a bachelor’s degree).
• Must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0.
• Must spend 6+ hours per week participating in a performing art cocurricular or extra-curricular activity that is led by a college staff of professor.

All qualified individuals are encouraged to apply, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, religion, (dis)ability, or national origin.

The study consists of two interviews, which may be conducted either by videoconference or in person. The first interview focuses on the participant’s life history and present day experience in relation to the topic (no more than 90 minutes); the second interview will allow the participant to reflect upon the meaning of the experiences (approximately 60 minutes).

If you or someone you know would like to participate in this study or learn more, please email parks.chr@husky.neu.edu or call 617-872-2404. Additionally, interested participants should fill out this online application (completing application will take less than 5 minutes). Selection for the study is not guaranteed, but will be determined during based on the information collected on the web form.

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* Required

First name: *
Confidentiality is guaranteed, and participants’ names will never be shared with others or used in the published results.

Last name: *
How old are you? *  
Participants must be 18 years old or older

Email address: *

Phone: *  
A phone number is needed so the researcher can call, give you more information, answer any questions you may have and schedule the interviews.

Current University: *

Current major:

Please verify that you are a college sophomore attending classes full time in the same institution where you began your college studies. *  
☐ Yes  
☐ No

Current GPA (cumulative) *

Are you a first generation college student? *  
The term “first generation college student” means – (A) an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or (B) in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

Were you eligible to receive a Pell Grant your Freshman and Sophomore years? *  
☐ Yes  
☐ No

Do you participate in a single cocurricular or extracurricular activity for 6 or more hours per week? *  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
Do you participate in multiple cocurricular or extracurricular activities for 6 or more hours per week? *
- Yes
- No

Please list your cocurricular or extracurricular activity or activities and the average number of hours you spend on the activity per week. *

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.
Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Institution: _____________________________________________________

Interviewee (Title and Name): ______________________________________

Interviewer: _____________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________

Location of Interview: ____________________________________

Previously attained background information will be collected via the web form.

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Intake Call

Thank you for your interest in this study. My name Chris Parks, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. This research is being conducted as my doctoral thesis project. The goal of the study is to explore at-risk first generation college sophomore’s experiences in cocurricular activities.

As the Student Researcher, I am also the person who will be conducting the interviews as well as the intake calls, like the one we are doing right now.
I reviewed the information that you provided on the on-line web application. I would just like to go over and verify that information; answer any questions you may have, and then schedule a time and place for our interviews.

• Can you verify your first and last name for me please??
• You indicated that you are xx years old, is that correct?
• I also see that you are a xx major at xx university, is that correct?
• And what year are you currently?
• Great, and you have only attended this university correct?
• Did either of your parents compete a baccalaureate degree?
• And are you currently receiving a Pell grant?
• And do you participate in cocurricular activities for 6 or more hours per week?
• Great, what activity(ies) do you participate in?
• Are your activities led by a college staff or faculty member?

Thank you. I’m happy to say that you meet all of the criteria in regards to participation in this study. Now I would like to tell you a bit more about the scope of this project.

This is an interpretative phenomenological analysis study. The main question being asked is: “How do at-risk college students describe their experience in cocurricular activities while enrolled college?”

This is a two-interview process. In the first interview, I’ll collect some basic background information, ask questions that focus on the period prior to participants entering college, and then inquire more specifically about the college experience. The first interview will last between 60-
90 minutes. During the second interview, I’ll ask follow-up questions based on information already provided in the first interview, honing in on the meaning participants make of certain things they spoke about. The second interview will last no longer then one-hour. All responses will be kept anonymous—identifying information would never be published.

That is a very brief overview of the study. Do you have any questions in regards to the research itself?

With that said, are you interesting in proceeding as a participant in this study?

Fantastic, what I’d like to do now is set up the times and locations for us to do the two interviews. It is important that we find a location free from distractions but that you will feel comfortable. (If participant is a student at the school I intend to recruit from I will have office space available to me to offer).

Both interviews need to take place within a 3-7 day period of each other. Like I mentioned, the first interview will last between 60-90 minutes, and the second one will be no longer then one hour. What times work for you?

Great. I’m going to email you an electronic copy of Consent Form, which tells you a bit more about the study and answers some common questions people often have in regards to research. I ask that you please read it over before the first interview. If you have any questions or concerns, you are of course free to contact me. We will go over the Consent Form together at the beginning of the interview, giving you another chance to ask any questions. If you then decide to continue with the interview, you will just have to give verbal consent at that time. Does that work?
Great, so that is it for now. I look forward to our first interview on ___. I will see you at ____________. Should anything come up please call me and we can reschedule.

I look forward to it...have a good day!

Interview #1

Part 1: Introductory Protocol

Introductory Question Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, review and receive verbal confirmation for the IRB protocol.

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has persisted from freshmen to sophomore year and who participates in cocurricular activities for at least six hours per week. Our research project focuses on how participation in cocurricular activities impacts your college experience. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into the impact of involvement in cocurricular activities. Hopefully this will help us understand the role cocurricular experiences play in college freshmen persisting to become sophomores and ultimately graduating from college.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I will employ the services of a professional transcribing service to transcribe our conversation, however, the service will not know your name. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the transcripts (other than the transcription service) and the tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed.
I would like to begin recording this session now, is that all right with you? OK, the audio recording has begun.

To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, participants have to read and verbally agree to the Consent Form that I sent you. I’d like to go over this form with you now. The Consent Form for this study, titled ‘College Connectedness Link to Success: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of Cocurricular Activities for Fostering Resilience in At-Risk College Freshman,’ states that all participants must be at least 18 years old. You are being asked to participate in two interviews focused around your life history and present day experiences in relation to your participation in cocurricular activities and being a first generation low-income student. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other participant as being part 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. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research and you can call that person confidentially, if you wish.

Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your verbal consent? Great, thank you.
This is the first of two interviews. We have planned this interview to last between 60-90 minutes. We will then do a follow-up interview 3-7 days from now, which will last no more than 60 minutes. Today, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Do you have any questions at this time?

**Part 2: Focused Life History**

**Objectives:** “To put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, 2006, p.21).

I would like for you to share your college experience with me, particularly the role that involvement in your cocurricular activity has had on your college experience. Today I will ask you focused questions about your life history and experiences prior to college, as well as questions directly related to your time in college.

*In our second and final interview we can follow up and further explore anything that you shared in this meeting and then also continue to talk about your college experience.*

Are you ready to begin?

1. Family
   
   a. Please share with me details of your family up until you began college without using their names:
      
      i. Parents and immediate family members
      ii. Parents’ educational background and employment
      iii. Siblings’ age and educational background
iv. Race and ethnicity

2. Low-income
   a. *Tell me about the neighborhood that you grew up in.*
   b. *Can you describe the schools you attended?*
   c. *Can you describe any experiences that influenced your decision to attend college?*
   d. *Why did you decide to attend college?*
   e. *Were finances a factor in your decision to attend college or where you ended up going to college?*

3. First-generation
   a. *Can you share what it is like to be the first in your family to attend college?*
   b. *Can you describe how this has affected you in any way while in college?*

4. Cocurricular activity
   a. Can you share with me the basic information about your cocurricular activity?
      i. How did you come to choose your chosen cocurricular activity?
      ii. Describe any key experiences that you believe influenced your decision to participate in this activity and to continue with this activity in college?

**Part 3: The details of the experience**

Objectives: “To concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2006, p.21).

1. *Tell me about your first year of college in a general sense.*

2. *Describe for me a typical day for you.*
   a. *What time do you wake up?*
b. Daily rituals?

c. Schedule.

d. Work?

e. Study.

f. Cocurricular activity.

g. Meals

h. What time do you typically go to sleep?

3.Reflecting on your first year of college, describe your participation in your chosen cocurricular activity.

a. Describe what do you actually do in this activity?

b. How many hours would you say you devote to your chosen activity in and if applicable outside of the activity?

4. **Caring relationships:** Talk about relationships you have formed since being in college.

a. Under what circumstances did you meet the people you are closest to?

b. How have these relationships evolved since they began?

c. What role if any have these relationships played in your college experience?

5. **Meaningful participation:** Can you describe the most significant time(s), event(s), or experience(s) that you had while at college?

a. Describe for me a tough or negative experience(s) you have had while in college.

6. **High Expectations:** Describe, if you can (if applicable), in as much detail as possible, a situation, time, or experience since being in college that you were pushed to grow or were placed outside of your comfort zone?

a. What were the circumstances surrounding this experience?
Part 4: Wrap-up

That concludes the questions for today’s interview. Before we wrap up, do you have any questions?

I want to confirm the time for the next/final interview: __________

Interview #2

Reflect on the meaning

Objective: “To encourage participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience…the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life.” (Seidman, 2006, p. 22)

Part 1: Introductory Protocol

Today’s interview will allow us to follow up on questions from the first interview. Similar to last time, I will be audio recording this interview. Are you ready to begin?

Part 2: Questioning

1. Given what you have said about your life before you matriculated and given what you have said about your life now, primarily your experience in your chosen cocurricular activity, can you describe any relationship there may be between your cocurricular participation and your academic success?
2. Given what you have shared in this interview, where do you see yourself going in the future (focus on future)?

Part 3: Wrap-up

Thank you, that concludes the interview questions for this final interview.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification was needed in regards to one of your responses, would it be all right for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Sometime over the next month, I will email you word-for-word transcripts and my initial interpretations of both interviews. If you chose, you can review the information, and you will have one week to provide me with any feedback, alterations, or corrections. Can you please confirm the email address you would like for me to email the transcripts to?

And once this thesis study is complete, which will most likely be 3-6 months from now, would you like to receive an electronic copy of the document?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study!

References