SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS: THE IMPACT ON HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED
STUDENTS’ FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This study examines six historically underserved students who participated in a summer bridge program. It aims to make sense of the students’ experiences and the perceived impact that participating in the program had on their first semester at a private, predominately white institution (PWI). Participants were identified as first-generation, low-income, or minority first-time first-year students. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the research methodology used to qualitatively explore the research problem. The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory geared towards self-efficacy is applied as the theoretical lens for designing the study. This study demonstrates that historically underserved students benefit from attending summer bridge programs. These programs support the development of self-efficacy and persistence among first-generation, low-income, and minority first-time first-year students at a private PWI. The first finding reflects how participation in the program develops confidence in academic success skills, social networking skills, diversity awareness, and empowers participants through their involvement. They are able to identify campus resources and make lasting friendships with peers and mentors. The second finding shows that it takes balance to engage both academically and socially, however, not all participants follow through with proper time management techniques early in their academic career despite attending workshops during the bridge program. The final finding is that participants are primarily, intrinsically motivated to succeed during their first semester in college but they also turn to family, friends, faculty, and staff for inspiration and support. Recommendations include developing and implementing high school to college transition programs, providing students with opportunities to identify social support early in the semester, offering continued on campus support and programs throughout
the semester, and educating and training faculty on the experiences of historically underserved student populations.

*Key words:* summer bridge program, historically underrepresented/underserved students, Title III Grant, predominately white institute (PWI), first-generation student, low-income, ethnic minority, persistence, retention, self-efficacy.
Acknowledgement Page

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of historically underserved students in their first semester at a private predominantly white (PWI) liberal arts institution, who had participated in a summer bridge program. Knowledge generated is utilized to inform college retention programs, diversity initiatives, and support services that impact historically underserved students in higher education. This study employs an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology to examine the phenomenon under study.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to summer bridge programs and historically underrepresented students to provide context and background for the study. The rationale and significance of the study is then discussed, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

Context and Background

Southeastern University is a small private four-year independent comprehensive master’s liberal arts institution that was formerly an all-women’s college. Southeastern prides itself on being ranked at number 20 in the 2014 US News & World Report as the most diverse of the state’s private universities within the "Regional Universities—South" category. However, the university has been slow to change in offering and implementing programs that support the success and retention of diverse student populations. Institutional administrators recognize the changing demographics on its campus and the need to better support historically underrepresented student success. A total of 27.9% of the university’s students self-identify as
coming from an ethnic minority background; 6.8% are international students, and 11.1% are racial or ethnic group unknown. Southeastern, therefore, applied for and was awarded a Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to improve the quality and enhance student support and retention initiatives. The grant completely funds the newly implemented summer bridge program for five consecutive years beginning in 2015 through to 2019, after which the program will be supported through a university endowment to continue serving underrepresented student populations at the end of the grant cycle.

Summer bridge programs are academic “boot camps” that provide students with math, writing, reading, pre-college resources, study skills, transition workshops, and help build social networks to the campus community in preparation for the first year of college (Douglas & Attewell, 2014; Levine & Levine, 1991). At Southeastern, the program is a week-long pre-college residential program titled the Excel Institute, which supports first-time, full-time student transition from high school to college. At the inception of the grant, student participants were identified by the Admission’s Office as academically at-risk, provisionally admitted students, which meant they did not demonstrate all the criteria required for full admission to Southeastern. Attendance at the summer bridge program was a required contingency for these students’ admission. Southeastern’s admission criteria consider standardized test scores, high school class rank, high school Grade Point Average (GPA), and other cognitive skill factors. However, during the 2017–2018 academic year, discussions between the Director of Admissions, Provost, Associate Dean for Student Success, and Student Success Coordinator led to a decision to invite not only academically at-risk, provisionally admitted students but all Title III high-need categories: racial or ethnic minority, first-generation, and low-income students. This implementation resulted in a diverse range of participants from academically at-risk to high-
achieving student applicants, and, thus, better serves all historically underserved student populations. A brief overview of the Title III high-need categories follows. A more detailed account is discussed in the literature review.

Predetermined by grant stipulations, students who fell within the Title III high-need categories were first-generation, low-income, or ethnic minority students. First-generation status was either self-reported or gathered from information collected from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Low-income information was gathered from the FAFSA and ethnic minority information was self-reported. There was a considerable degree of intersectionality of the high-need categories among the summer bridge participants. This intersectionality aligns with research on historically underrepresented students. Stuart (2013) has noted that first-generation students come from racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. Chen and Carroll (2005) have also recognized the intersectionality between first-generation status, ethnic minority group, and socio-economic status, noting that in comparison to their peers whose parents were college graduates, first-generation students were more likely to be Black or Hispanic and come from low-income families. Historically underserved student populations also struggle with persisting with college as they move towards graduation. First-generation student persistence is disproportionately lower than that of continuing-generation students. They reportedly have higher drop-out rates and are less likely to graduate than their non-first-generation peers (Woosley & Shepler, 2011).

Post-secondary institutions cannot change the background and capital that some of their students enter college with, however, colleges and universities can develop more support and transition programs that can increase the likelihood of persistence among historically underserved students. Research on summer bridge programs has demonstrated that they support
persistence due to their proven track records of developing positive self-esteem, confidence, and worth (Francis & Miller, 2008). Therefore, this study seeks to understand how first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority student participants made sense of the Excel Institute’s impact on their self-efficacy during the first semester in college.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study is the researcher’s interest in understanding how summer bridge programs can support the development of self-efficacy for first-time, full-time students and increase persistence in the first semester of college for historically underrepresented students. The study aims to consider how institutional practices can be informed to positively impact these student groups. The nature of diversity in higher education is changing and more underrepresented students are gaining admission to post-secondary institutions. Although these students are gaining access, the transition from high school to college is a difficult and challenging time for first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students (Hicks, 2005). Without proper intervention, some of these students do not persist to graduation (Suzuki, Amrein-Beardsley, & Perry, 2012). Many historically underrepresented students are labeled “at-risk” or “underprepared”, based on standardized testing, high school GPA, and other academic factors (Hicks, 2005). Hicks (2003) has suggested that this lack of collegiate preparation for first-generation students is due to varying socio-cultural expectations, financial constraints, academic preparation, parental support, and perceived lower self-esteem than their non-first-generation counterparts. Since many first-generation students also come from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds, it is suggested that this lack of preparation could also pertain to some members of these categories as well.
The results of this study could be of significance in impacting college persistence for historically underrepresented students who participate in a summer bridge program. In an attempt to mitigate obstacles for these students, some institutions provide support to underrepresented students by encouraging participation in pre-college experiences (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). In the pilot year for the Excel Institute at Southeastern University it was important to understand how student participants made meaning of the impact of the program on their self-efficacy during the first semester in college. Summer bridge programs impact social, interpersonal, and non-cognitive skill development, which increase the confidence and self-esteem of participants (Kezar, 2000; Levitz & Noel, 1989). These traits are characteristics of developing self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the ability to self-manage and to be responsible for one’s actions, which produces positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Strayhorn (2011) has found that summer bridge attendance improved students self-reported academic skills and self-efficacy. This research impacts stakeholders at Southeastern University as they continue to work towards implementing programs to support historically underserved students. The findings of this research are also of value to various stakeholders in higher education.

Adding to the body of literature on summer bridge programs presents implications for campus stakeholders who work towards the recruitment, retention, and success of historically underrepresented college students. Applications and enrollments by first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority student populations are increasing, which is diversifying the demographic make-up of colleges and universities at PWIs. Campus beneficiaries such as admission offices, retention programs, student success centers, and diversity offices are likely to benefit from this investigation. It is important for these services to understand how student
participants make meaning of their experiences in order that programmatic outcomes, persistence, and retention rates can be improved.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

Higher educational institutions are becoming more diverse and it is important for universities to properly support and retain historically underserved student populations. This would help more college graduates enter into an educated diverse democracy. Although institutions are becoming more diverse, research on low enrollment and retention rates for these populations demonstrates that disparities persist relating to how to properly transition, support, and retain first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students. For example, 53% of low-income students enroll directly into college after high school in comparison to 87% of students from the highest income quartile (Strayhorn, 2011). In terms of graduation rates, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that 46% of 12th graders who enrolled in post-secondary education had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher within eight years, but only 24% of first-generation students had obtained the same (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). When the intersectionality of these groups is reviewed, “rates can be appallingly lower for low-income students of color who may face double disadvantages, intersecting oppressions, and multiple barriers to their college entry” (Strayhorn, 2011, p. 143).

Since research has shown that academic and social preparation are critical factors that predict college enrollment and success (Adelman, 1999; Hicks, 2005; Strayhorn, 2011) and pre-college programs for historically underserved students can support college transition and persistence (Hicks, 2005), it is important to understand the effects of a summer bridge program
on self-efficacy and the first semester experience. Therefore, the purpose of this study with first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students in a summer bridge program is to understand how they make meaning of their experience in the summer bridge program upon completion of their first semester in college. The research question this study sought to answer was: How do historically underserved students make meaning of their participation in a pre-college summer bridge program while enrolled in their first semester at a private, liberal arts PWI?

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Summer Bridge Program** – A pre-college program geared towards the transition to college for first-time, first-year, at-risk students by offering academic and social programs to help students become better acquainted with resources and build a connection to the institution (Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005).

**Historically Underrepresented and Underserved Students** – Students who fall into any of the following categories: first-generation, low-income, and racial or ethnic minority students who, based on their background, have historically been identified as having a higher risk of dropping out of college in comparison to their traditionally served peers.

**Title III Grant** – A federal grant sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The Title III Grant in this study is a “Strengthening Institutions Program” grant that supports student success and retention initiatives.

**Predominately white institute (PWI)** – Institutions where white students make up the numerical majority of the campus population (Taylor, Austin, Perkins, & Edwards, 2012).
**First-Generation Student** – A student for whom neither parent nor guardian graduated with a four-year bachelor’s degree (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

**Low-income** – An individual whose socio-economic level is in the bottom income quartile, meaning their family’s taxable income from the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount. For the purpose of this study, low-income is defined as being Pell Grant eligible. Eligibility for the federal grant is commonly used as a determining factor for low-income status (Cook & King, 2007; Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015).

**Ethnic Minority** – A group that has different cultural traditions from the majority of the population at the institution. This study looks at African American, Latin American, and Asian American ethnic minority groups.

**Persistence** – A student’s post-secondary education continuation behavior that leads to graduation. Persistence in this study is from first semester to second semester during the first year of college.

**Retention** – An institutional measurement that indicates a percentage of students who re-enroll from the previous year.

**Self-efficacy** – The belief in your own ability to manage and carry out actions that will produce positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

The following section of this chapter includes a description and discussion of the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), which serves as the theoretical lens for this study.
Theoretical Framework

This study utilized the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) as the theoretical framework to explore first semester experiences of historically underserved students who participated in a summer bridge program. The agentic perspective of SCT differentiates three modes of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective. Each mode of agency is founded in a person’s ability to believe in one’s own actions to make things happen and to effect change, which is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Ng & Luciannetti, 2015).

A brief history of SCT follows, describing early research relating to Bandura and self-efficacy from three varying frameworks. First, Bandura’s social learning theory (SLT) (1977) is considered; then, later transitioning into SCT (1986); and finally, how it is further enhanced through the agentic perspective of SCT (2001). Critics of SCT are considered, along with the rationale for utilizing this theoretical framework. This section concludes by considering how the agentic perspective of SCT applies to this study.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

The seminal work of Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of SLT. The key premise of SLT is the ideal that an individual’s environment can influence behavior and impact on desired personal outcomes. Hence, a person’s characteristics, in addition to environmental factors, impact behavior. The interaction between a person and the environment is termed “reciprocal determinism” (Bandura, 1977). Reciprocal determinism means that "behavior, thought and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interlocking determinants of each other” (Bandura, 1981, p. 30). This phenomenon describes how a person influences the environment and how the environment influences a person. This shared interaction among the environment (external social context), the behavior (responses to stimuli to achieve goals), and
the person (individual with a set of learned experiences) has been found to influence student learning (Barclay, 1982; Bandura, 1986).

In addition to the concept of reciprocal determinism, Bandura (1977) has also discussed self-efficacy expectations. In SLT, self-efficacy plays a primary role for investigating behavior as it relates to creating and improving personal outcomes (Bandura, 1977). It is important to note that expectations may not meet desired outcomes depending on how much an individual has self-doubts about their ability to perform the desired activity, and, thus, influencing their behavior and desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). There are two motivational factors that differentiate expectations: efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Bandura (1977) has found it important to distinguish between the two because it is possible to believe in a desired outcome but to, nevertheless, possess self-doubt that the outcome will actually occur. Efficacy expectation correlates to belief and outcome expectation correlates to behavior. An individual’s belief that they can successfully complete an action to produce a desired outcome is an efficacy expectation. An individual’s assumption that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes is an outcome expectation (Barclay, 1982). These expectations, whether positive or negative, are reflected in one’s personal psychological state and belief in oneself, thus, changing the degree and power of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism were introduced utilizing SLT and they continue to be central determinants of behavior in SCT (Barclay, 1982; Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1996). The theory of SCT has been applied broadly to various research areas such as human resources and functioning, career decision making, organizational behavior, athletics, mental and physical health, educational motivation, student learning, expectations, and achievement
The theory is an interactive connected model extending SLT and observes the interacting determinants of causation between environmental factors, personal-cognitive factors, and behavior (Bandura, 1986).

The theory’s key premise postulates that people act with purpose, driven by goals, and are motivated by intrinsic beliefs in efficacy expectations and outcome expectations derived from social environmental contexts (Pajares, 1996). Grounded in human agency, the interdependence of three main interacting determinants are modes of human functioning. The three main determinants can be explained best by utilizing a three-point model between behavior, person, and environment called the triadic reciprocal causation model to indicate a functional dependence between events (Bandura, 1986; Bandura 1997). In this model, a person is neither drawn by intrinsic factors nor shaped by external stimuli, but there is mutual action between the causative factors (Bandura, 1986). Bandura’s (1997) research has enhanced the original 1986 model from a unidirectional model to a bidirectional model (see fig. 1).

![Triadic reciprocal causation model](image)

**Figure 1. Triadic reciprocal causation model: Bandura (1997) Person, Environment, and Behavior**

The triangular model depicts intrinsic personal factors including cognitive, affective, and biological events; behavior; and environmental events, all operating and mutually interacting with one another, influencing self-efficacy and outcome expectations bidirectionally (Bandura,
It is important to observe that Bandura (1997) has identified the personal factors as having three key processes that have a significant impact on human agency. The nature of human agency is founded on the idea that people can exercise influence over what they do based on various interacting factors (Bandura, 1997). The three key factors are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and self-regulated learning. It is important to note the difference between SCT and self-efficacy. The competent development of skills and the regulation of actions are addressed in SCT, whereas self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in SCT; the belief of personal efficacy is influenced by belief and motivation to achieve desired expected outcomes (Bandura, 1997). This research focuses mainly on self-efficacy beliefs, which constitute a major component of SCT.

**Self-efficacy**

Social cognitive theory proposes that an individual’s belief in their own ability to manage and carry out actions to achieve desired positive outcomes is known as self-efficacy (Ng & Lucianetti, 2015; Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is directly related to predicting behavior as to whether one will engage, persevere, and accomplish one’s goals (Bandura, 1997). It is also known to influence confidence, impact goal setting, and enhance selfbelief, whether positive or negative (Pajares, 1996). Self-efficacy is task-specific, and from a higher educational perspective, self-efficacy beliefs can impact on a student’s academic and social performance for different types of functions such as academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, transition self-efficacy, and career decision making self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996; Hau, 2012). When applying self-efficacy beliefs to this study, the researcher observed the impact of a summer bridge program on student participants’ first semester experiences upon completion of the summer bridge program. It is important to note that in addition to academic workshops, participants in this research study also attended personal development seminars on self-efficacy, growth
mindset, and collegiate expectations in order to provide them with the social capital needed to transition to college.

The Agentic Perspective of Social Cognitive Theory

It was important to discuss the historical perspectives of Bandura’s SLT and SCT in order to understand the theoretical transformations it has undergone over the years. Understanding the history of SCT provides insight into its underpinning of reciprocal determinism between the person and environment; and triadic reciprocal causation between the person, behavior, and environment. These seminal theories are the backbone and predecessors of Bandura’s agentic perspective of SCT (2001), which guides this research study. The agentic perspective says agents are individuals who intentionally make things happen through their own abilities and actions, which is also known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015). Self-efficacy constitutes the key factor of human agency (Bandura, 1997). Like SCT, the agentic perspective also utilizes a triadic reciprocal causation framework distinguishing among three modes of human agency. The three modes of human agency include personal, proxy, and collective agency, each of which is founded on the belief in an individual’s capability to play a role in interpersonal development, adaptation, and self-renewal to effect change (Bandura, 2001).

**Personal Agency.** Personal agency addresses the bidirectional influence between social structure and individual actions. In many walks of life, individuals do not have direct control over the social and institutional conditions or the environment that shapes and affects their everyday lives (Bandura 2001). Hence the main agentic features of personal agency are: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001) on the part of the individual.
Intentionality is an individual’s self-motivated proactive commitment towards bringing about a future course of action (Bandura, 2001). In addition to the directed planning of intentionality as it relates to personal agency, forethought has to also occur. Since future events do not exist, they cannot be the cause of present motivation. Therefore, forethought is an individual’s ability to cognitively anticipate future events based on current motivators (Bandura, 2001). Forethought allows people to plan ahead, prioritize, and provide direction as a person working towards anticipated outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Anticipatory self-efficacy and motivation towards an unrealized future state of being based on projected goals promotes foresightful behavior (Bandura, 2001).

Agents also have to be self-motivators. After one has planned and thought about what the anticipated action is going to be, a person has to have the ability to carry out the plan. Self-reactiveness is a person’s ability to regulate and execute their course of action. This agentic perspective of personal agency directly connects thought that encompasses goals and values with individual action (Bandura, 2001). Lastly, when dealing with personal agency a person must ascertain self-reflectiveness, which is an individual’s ability to apply metacognitive skills towards evaluating and examining one’s own produced actions (Bandura, 2001).

**Proxy Agency.** Social environments continue to play a major role in the agentic perspective. In this framework, people are producers as well as products of social systems. Personal agency implies that the individual is accountable for their own actions. Proxy agency is socially constructed, and individuals work with others who have social capital to act on their behalf to secure desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001).

**Collective Agency.** Not being confined to personal agency, which looks at the individual, and proxy agency, which looks at social environments, collective agency can also influence
events that affect people’s lives. Collective agency looks at the efficacy and the attainment of individuals who are connected by groups. The effects of the group dynamic helps people operate jointly with a shared belief that will drive them towards both individual as well as group outcomes (Bandura, 2001).

**Critics of Social Cognitive Theory**

Research studies in various fields have used SCT to understand how people interact with their environment. One criticism of the theory concerns the assumption that environmental changes will directly relate to individual change. This assumption may not always be true. Also, the reciprocal dynamic between the person, behavior, and environment is ever changing and there needs to be more clarity on how they impact and influence on another (Gilson, Chow, & Feltz, 2012). Vancouver (2005) has asserted that SCT heavily focuses on the process of learning and there is minimal attention paid to current experiences. This process disregards current biological and hormonal predispositions by focusing mostly on past experience that can have an impact on current motivation. The theory is also broad-reaching and it can be difficult to operationalize.

Additionally, Vancouver (2005) has criticized SCT for not crediting an individual’s nonconscious thought processes as they interact with behavior and the environment. Also, there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance. However, there are claims that this research omits relevant data and interpretations such as how self-efficacy positively affects behavior, and, in particular, how people experience self-doubt for adequate motivation related to the mastery of challenges (Gilson et al., 2012). A final criticism is that SCT claims that learning is a requisite component of appropriately measuring self-efficacy, however, Vancouver (2005)
has argued that if individuals learn a skill, by default the next time their self-efficacy is measured it will be higher because they have “learned” from past mistakes.

**Rationale**

Utilizing SCT, and more specifically the agentic perspective of SCT, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the way historically underrepresented students make meaning of their first semester experience in college at a private PWI. Bandura (1986) has noted that people who try harder and longer have higher amounts of self-efficacy and do more to persist than those who have higher amounts of anxiety or lower perceived self-efficacy. Emphasis is placed on how participation in a summer bridge program helped to develop self-efficacy practices and support the transition and matriculation during the first semester. Since low-income, first-generation, minority students at private PWIs are less likely to persist towards graduation than their privileged counterparts, it is important to study this population of students. Some of these students are determined to succeed but they may lack the requisite skills to succeed in a college environment. They may also experience low self-efficacy and view activities with a sense of futility (Bandura, 1977). They may have learned behaviors that they are not good enough or do not deserve to attend college, especially those who may be admitted to the institution on a provisional basis and are required by the Admission’s Office to participate in the bridge program.

A person’s perceived self-efficacy influences his or her self-regulated behavior (Bandura, 1986). Self-regulation and the development of self-efficacy is crucial to college student success. How a person views what he or she is capable of doing affects his or her self-regulated behavior. This can either positively or negatively impact persistence and self-efficacy beliefs as it relates to SCT. Learned behaviors are cognitively based and operated by personal motivating factors that
activate persistence behavior (Bandura, 1977). This means an individual’s thought process regarding what they want in the future can be driven by their current cognition, which can influence persistence, motivation, and thus increase self-efficacy. The topics discussed above are the reasons why this theory is optimal for this study.

**Applying theory to your study**

With increased institutional diversity, it is important to support and retain historically underserved student populations towards degree attainment. Academic and social pre-college transition processes are critical factors that predict college success for historically underserved students (Hicks, 2005). The agentic perspective of SCT was applied in this study to understand the effects of a summer bridge program on the first semester experiences of the student participants. Agents are individuals who intentionally make things happen through their own abilities and actions. By observing the person, behavior, and environment as well as the triadic reciprocal causation framework distinguishing among personal, proxy, and collective agency, it is possible to assess whether the bridge program played a role in the interpersonal development, adaptation, and self-renewal processes of the student participants.

People have certain beliefs about their ability to function as a determining factor of how they act, think, and react emotionally during tough situations. Self-beliefs thus contribute to the quality of psychosocial functioning in diverse ways (Bandura, 1986). For example, the level of involvement and interaction with bridge programming as well as with faculty and mentors impacts on participants’ self-beliefs and contributes to their first semester experiences once enrolled. Who someone is, and the individual self, are constructed socially. However, people have individual self-influence, which also makes them participants in their own role in creating who they are and what they want to do or become (Bandura, 1997). During the bridge program,
mentors and program facilitators were socially impacting student participants by leading workshops on how to overcome difficult obstacles in college, increasing self-efficacy, developing a positive mindset, and developing a personalized success plan. Program staff constantly reminded students about the available resources on campus that could help them during challenging times. However, students individually have the ability to also contribute to their own experiences during positive and uncertain times. Bandura (1986) has mentioned that, during times of uncertainty, having a strong sense of self-efficacy can diminish self-doubt and increase greater efforts to master a challenge.

Overall, experiences are socially and individually constructed. The agentic perspective fosters lines of research into this student population, providing new insights into the social construction of historically underrepresented students. Results from this study fill a gap in the current research on first-generation, low-income, minority students. The application of the agentic perspective of SCT provides insight into the interaction of the students, their behavior, and the college environment as they traverse through personal, proxy, and collective agency, which contribute to interpersonal development, adaptation, and self-renewal for the student participants. The following chapter discusses the literature on first-generation, low-income, minority students as well as providing more information on self-efficacy and summer bridge programs.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The aim of the literature review is to discern how researchers have approached and explained a variety of issues related to the problem of practice. This study provides insight into the first semester experiences of historically underrepresented student participants in a summer bridge program at a small private PWI. The nature of diversity and the student demographic make-up at higher educational institutions are becoming more diverse. More historically underrepresented students are enrolling thus adding value to the overall student experience. Enrolling more diverse students opens up the opportunity to engage in diversified dialogue both inside and outside of the classroom, however, retention and graduation rates are low among historically underserved student populations. Although access to higher education is equal, the transition from high school to college is not always equitable due to social and cultural differences that first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students may bring with them to college (Suzuki et al., 2012; Hicks, 2005). Historically underrepresented students are often viewed through a deficit model and labeled “at-risk” or “underprepared” based on standardized testing, high school GPA, and other pre-college academic factors (Hicks, 2005). Hicks (2003) has suggested that this lack of collegiate preparation for first-generation students is due to varying sociocultural expectations, financial constraints, academic preparation, parental support, and perceived lower self-esteem than their non-first-generation counterparts. Without proper transition programs and intervention strategies throughout their matriculation, some of these students do not persist towards graduation. In order to assist with transition and persistence of historically underserved students, research has shown that pre-college programs that incorporate academic and social preparation workshops for low-income, first-generation, minority students may support their retention (Hicks, 2005).
Since academic and social preparation are critical factors that predict college enrollment and success, it is important to understand the effects of a pre-college summer bridge program on self-efficacy and the first semester experience for students. Understanding their pre-college, transition, and persistence experiences can help practitioners better shape student collegiate experiences for retention and success. Thus, it was necessary to review the literature on historically underrepresented students, summer bridge programs, and self-efficacy and historically underrepresented students. The literature review is organized around the aforementioned categories.

**Historically Underrepresented Students**

Strayhorn (2014) has noted that historically underrepresented students are those who are minority, first in their family to attend college, or come from low-income backgrounds. These students may face financial challenges that are presented as obstacles while navigating the college-going and completion process. In order to support these students and minimize the drop-out rates for historically underrepresented students, institutions need to incorporate policy and procedures to specifically target them rather than simply focusing on retention efforts for the overall student body (Thayer, 2000).

In addition to institutions implementing policies and support programs to aid in historically underrepresented student success, national inequalities related to inclusiveness of these student populations need to be addressed. Creating a more educated diverse democracy is imperative and addressing these students’ attainment rates and socio-economic barriers are important aspects of that (George-Jackson, Rincon, & Martinez, 2012). Higher educational institutions should be preparing students to be integrated into a global workforce that adds value to the economy. Obtaining a degree supports this aim because graduates earn more over time and
have higher tax revenues. Diverse college graduates also benefit the larger population by adding breadth to various social and economic perspectives (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid, 2010). This first strand of literature focuses on research that discusses the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Grant and reviews the specific categories of historically underrepresented students that are identified as low-income, first-generation, or ethnic minority students. The discourse around the intersectionality of these high-need categories is also reviewed.

**U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Grant**

Dramatic growth in student enrollment may lead to increased student diversity, however, institutions are often unprepared because academic and student support services for diverse student populations are sometimes fragmented. During times of extensive growth, efforts to help historically underserved students may take a reactive approach towards providing continuous and meaningful degree pathways for students versus a proactive one. With support from federal programs such as the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Grant, higher educational institutions are able to proactively establish and build in an endowment for underrepresented students. The purpose of the grant is to provide eligible institutions with funding that helps expand their fiscal ability to serve all students and, particularly, historically underserved students, such as first-generation, low-income, and minority students by strengthening the institution’s academic quality, student support services, and institutional management practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). To be eligible to apply for the grant an institution must be accredited and demonstrate that at least 50% of its students are receiving need-based assistance under Title IV of the Higher Education Act such as Pell Grants, Federal Work Study, and loans (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As defined within program regulations, the eligibility requirements may be waived under conditional terms by the Secretary of the Department of
Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Eligible schools may use the funding received to enhance faculty development, institutional planning, academic support services, academic program quality, retention programs, remedial education, information management systems, faculty and student interactions, English language instruction, curriculum development, and to establish an endowment fund (Queens, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The average award amount for new applicants over the span of the five year grant cycle is $445,000.

Research has shown that Title III funding provided to institutions of higher education has supported collaborative approaches to supporting student success through faculty engagement and early intervention programs that have improved retention (Heen, 2010). Some institutions utilize Title III funds to develop first-year seminar and pre-college orientation programs providing services, tools, and resources designed to help students transition to the collegiate environment (Ko & Rossen, 2010). Student participation in these programs has been tied to effective retention strategies and positive campus connections. Title III funds may also be utilized to increase faculty and student interactions through research based projects and mentorship. When faculty and students interact beyond the classroom environment it can create a renewed relationship and promote student achievement (Brookes & German, 1983).

Most contemporary institutions serve a wide range of students coming from various sociocultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Limited funding is causing colleges to react to the needs of the students when circumstances arise instead of creating a plan and developing an approach to proactively serve the needs of a new diverse campus community (Gabriel, 2008). Tinto has indicated that institutional efforts towards combating attrition and increasing retention rates must be proactive, focused, and promote student learning (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Tinto, 2006). Applying for Title III funding is a proactive
approach to strengthening academic and student support services at post-secondary institutions. An endowment fund can be established to continue to support students beyond the grant cycle. These funds make it possible for colleges to enhance programs geared towards retention efforts such as pre-college orientation programs, faculty and student mentoring, and curriculum development. Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) have indicated how these programmatic enhancements may increase student involvement, satisfaction, and persistence, which positively influence retention of historically underrepresented students. In the grant proposal, Southeastern University identified 73% of their student population as high-need, which is defined in the Federal Register (76 FR 27637) (Queens University of Charlotte, 2013). For the purpose of this research study, the high-need categories focusing on low-income, first-generation, and ethnic minority students, which are identified in the Title III grant, are explored below.

**Low-Income Students in Higher Education**

Low-income students are students who have been assessed as having financial need in attending college (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid, 2010). In order to determine financial need, students fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to enrolling. Part of the U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid sponsors millions of students by providing grants, loans, and work-study funds to help students financially with their educational pursuits (Federal Student Aid, 2017). Results from the FAFSA determine financial need, which is the difference between institutional cost and the student’s expected family contribution (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid, 2010).

As it relates to the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III grant, low-income students are defined as students who are Pell Grant eligible as determined from the FAFSA and they often come from low-socio-economic backgrounds (Cook & King, 2007; Saunders & Schuh, 2004).
Pell Grants were implemented in order to increase post-secondary access for students who come from low-income backgrounds where students are rewarded funds directly to attend any institution of their choice. Students from low-socio-economic backgrounds are also Pell Grant recipients because their household income ranks in the bottom quartile, which is below the poverty level and their household education level is less than a bachelor’s degree (Cook & King, 2007; Saunders & Schuh, 2004). A total of 73% of low-income students, in comparison with 30% of their high-income peers, stated that financial aid is a major deciding factor in their process of going to college (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2010). Since 2008, President Obama has increased the maximum Pell Grant award by almost $1,000, which has expanded college access for low-income and middle class students by 50% (USA.gov, 2016). Although Pell Grant awards have increased, the maximum Pell Grant award for the 2014–15 year was $5,730 (USA.gov, 2016). The grants have not kept up with inflation or tuition increases, which are partly due to public institutions having to pass on reduced state and federal support to students by raising tuition and fees (Cook & King, 2007; Heller, 2002).

Various financial factors impact on college choice, enrollment, and persistence decisions for all students, and they are particularly difficult for low-income students. Even with federal grants aiding with financial hardships, these students are still often heavily burdened with having to find additional funds to attend college. They have greater sensitivity pertaining to tuition fluctuations and high college attendance costs negatively affect their college decision making processes. Students from low socio-economic background, also grapple with parental influences on which colleges to attend, yet many of their parents may lack the cultural capital pertaining to making sound estimations about the actual cost of attending college because it is more likely than not that they did not attend college themselves (Saunders & Schuh, 2004).
Saunders and Schuh (2004) have recognized that in order to truly gain an understanding of finances and persistence, one must look at a holistic picture in determining factors of influence. Coupling academic and social experiences can benefit low-income students’ college experience and they are more likely to get involved and live on campus, which provides important developmental experiences for these students. Creating a strong, social environment once enrolled, while finding employment on campus have been noted to positively impact on persistence for these students. For example, work-study students had higher GPAs and were more involved in campus extracurricular activities compared to those who held off campus jobs, which negatively impacted on persistence (Saunders & Schuh, 2004).

In addition to financial destitution, other challenges such as access, academic preparation, social adjustment, and low graduation rates among low-income student populations are common (Heller, 2002; Cook & King, 2007). In order to offset the disproportional effects of ever rising college tuition fees, these students take out more loans and seek out part-time work opportunities to account for the added economic burden of college attendance (George-Jackson et al., 2012). They also demographically tend to be the first in their families to attend college, are from racial and ethnic minorities, come from single parent homes, have English as a second language, and unfortunately have a high risk of attrition (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Due to various risk factors, they are the least likely to enroll and graduate from college with a four-year degree. The college completion rate for low-income students is around 25% compared to a completion rate of more than half for those who come from the wealthiest quartile and graduate within six years, thus increasing the college attainment gap (USA.gov, 2016).

Educational researchers have also identified preparedness for college as another challenge that low-income students face (Saunders & Schuh, 2004). Strayhorn (2014) has
conducted a research study to evaluate college readiness differences among socio-economic status groups and found some statistically significant differences. Results indicated that students in the highest economic quartile consistently outperformed their lower socio-economic status peers in college readiness based on standardized reading scores, math scores, and college preparation. High-SES students also receive early messaging about the importance of attending college and they have the social and cultural capital for early educational resources and networks that support college readiness. These factors enhance their college aspirations, which are affirmed by their college educated parents (Strayhorn, 2014).

Low-income students face financial barriers towards enrolling and persisting in college, however, social support, on campus jobs, and campus involvement positively impact on retention among low-income students. As mentioned above, many low-income students are the first in their family to attend college. The following section provides more information on how researchers have evaluated first-generation student experiences in higher education.

**First-generation Students in Higher Education**

The experience of going to college for first-generation students can often be a difficult one as they attempt to traverse a new culture, language, and history that their parents did not experience. Students whose parents went to college already possess this cultural and social capital and benefit from their parents’ experiences, such as understanding what a syllabus is and the importance of connecting with faculty early in the semester (Strayhorn, 2014). A first-generation student is one for whom neither parent nor guardian graduated post-secondary education with a four-year bachelor’s degree (U. S. Department of Education, 1996). They are more likely to be from a racial or ethnic minority and come from a low-income background. Banks-Santilli (2015) have considered the national data and have noted that of the 7.3 million
four-year undergraduate students, approximately 20% are first-generation and about half of all first-generation students are low-income.

First-generation college students may arrive at college with fewer resources, requisite skills, and knowledge necessary for collegiate success. Strayhorn (2014) has noted that similar to low-income student experiences, first-generation students performed lower in college readiness scores that factor into the likelihood for success. They also scored lower on standardized math, reading, and writing tests in comparison to their continuing-generation counterparts. They also present more academic needs. This factor may present implications for early outreach and college preparatory programs that target middle and high schools students and college summer transition programs for those who would be the first in their families to attend college (Strayhorn 2014). Despite the challenges they may face on college enrollment, these students’ educational pursuits show that they want to give back to their family and the community upon graduation. In comparison to non-first-generation students, 69% of them want to help their families and 61% want to give back to their communities compared to 39% and 43% respectively (Banks-Santilli, 2015). Similar to low-income students, first-generation students face collegiate related barriers while they also embody resilient characteristics that support their persistence. There is also overlap between first-generation students and minority status. Research on racial and ethnic minority students in higher education is discussed below.

**Racial and Ethnic Minority Students in Higher Education**

Due to racial legalization with segregation and the Jim Crow laws enforced in Southern states from the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement (1877–1950s), it has been historically difficult for minority students to have equal access and support to educational opportunities in comparison to White students (Brown & Davis, 2001). The Plessy v.
Ferguson (1896) case ruled that Whites and Blacks could be “separate but equal.” This decision sparked the growth of minority-serving institutions such as historically Black colleges (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges designed to educate African American, Hispanic, and Native American students because better resourced and prestigious schools were not accessible to minority students (Brown & Davis, 2001). Segregation was outlawed with the ruling of Brown v. The Board of Education (1954), which overturned Plessy v. Ferguson and sparked the movement for equality in education for all students. Although this decision enabled minority students to be integrated into the American educational systems, racial discrimination was still prevalent. The past events of racism and oppression continue to impact on student experiences with college access and enrollment. More students are being included in education, but the practices are often not inclusive. Students are viewed as having equal opportunities however, they are not always equitable. This inequity results in experiences with disproportionate pre-college barriers to higher education for these students, which impacts on the process of going to college.

Pre-college readiness is one of those areas that demonstrates educational achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students that can impact on their collegiate experiences. Strayhorn (2014) has reported on the racial disparities of reading and math standardized test scores, classroom preparation, and perceived writing ability of high school seniors. The results indicated that White and Asian students were more college-ready than their minority peers (African American, Latino, and Native American). Although some minority students may enter college with pre-existing barriers, it is important for post-secondary education administrators, faculty, and staff to understand the resiliency and self-efficacy that many bring with them to college.
Research indicates that support programs are essential when it comes to minority student retention and persistence efforts. Blake and Moore (2004) have noted that effective processes include academic and social support opportunities that include faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students from similar as well as diverse backgrounds. These processes can all be impactful for minority undergraduate students. Blake and Moore have further reported that minority students need early social connections through pre-college programs and more regular assistance throughout the year with programs such as mentor groups and collaborative study groups, which maintain communication with academic support to help these students find balance and not become overwhelmed by the rigors of college life. Forming these connections with faculty and other support groups on campus can help bridge misunderstandings and misperceptions about college, and, thus, increase these students’ social and cultural capital pertaining to college life (Blake & Moore, 2004). Results from the study demonstrated that pre-college initiatives, support programs, higher course expectations, and students’ active involvement in learning increased the six-year graduation rate among African American students and their cohort’s completion rate was well above the national average.

Conclusion

Because there is much overlap between high-need categories as described by the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Grant pertaining to historically underserved students, there is a need to closely examine the context and profile of the intersectionality of low-income, first-generation, and racial minority students. Swail (2002) has noted that low-income minority youth were projected to be the fastest growing college-going population in the U.S. over fifteen years ago. Although these students are enrolling, more recent research shows that completion rates are lower among these students (George-Jackson et al., 2012). In relation to college enrollment, low-
income and minority students often self-select to not attend highly selective research institutions because they have preconceived perceptions regarding the financial commitment. Since they also may be the first in their family to attend college, they do not want to place additional financial burdens on their families who do not have the social or cultural capital to understand the college-going process (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

In order to address educational achievement gaps, institutions are committing to improve graduation outcomes for historically underserved students by increasing academic and social support programs to help with persistence among low-income, first-generation, and minority students. By recognizing their academic, financial, social and personal needs, institutions are taking a comprehensive approach to their success, which has been positively correlated to their success. Booth, Cooper, Karandjeff, Purnell, Schiorring, and Willett (2013) have noted several factors that can lead to success for historically underserved students. These factors are building relationships, connecting to campus resources, working on campus, involving their families, feeling recognized for their individuality, and expanding programs for special populations such as pre-college programs geared towards college transition and success.

**Summer Bridge Programs**

Over ten years ago the U.S. Department of Education (2006) acknowledged the importance of post-secondary education for the country’s need for homeland security, global competitiveness, and innovation in the Commission on Higher Education’s Report. However, this report also recognized several shortcomings of the educational high school to college pipeline and the need for accountability systems ensuring students’ readiness for college. President Barack Obama further acknowledged the importance of college readiness by investing more than $100 million in a College Pathways program that focused on preparing high school
graduates to be “career and college-ready” through high school preparation programs. He also addressed the need to improve graduation rates. Despite these efforts, students continued to not be college-ready once they graduated from high school (Moore & Shulock 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Strayhorn (2014) has noted that only 23% of the high school graduates were college-ready without having to take college remediation courses based on their ACT scores and one third of them lacked basic math and literacy skills. This lack of preparation leads to low graduation rates. Strayhorn has stated that only 35% of bachelor’s degree seekers earn their degree within four years and 56% complete within six years at four-year institutions. Slade, Eatmon, Staley, and Dixon (2015) have recognized that students face many challenges, in addition to academic preparedness, that impact on whether or not they are successful upon college enrollment. They, further, have noted that summer bridge programs are used as tools to address college readiness.

Most of the aforementioned data have addressed the lack of preparation of high school graduates and the perceived college preparation they received in the secondary education setting. Moore and Shulock (2009) have discussed the need for U.S. higher educational institutions to improve their college completion rates because students often enroll but drop out before they earn a degree. This further supports the need for summer bridge programs, also known as pre-college programs, which aim to recognize this educational gap in preparing incoming students for the academic and social demands of college life (Strayhorn, 2014).

These programs are often offered to high school graduates during the summer of their transition from secondary to post-secondary education. The purpose of the transition is to pave the way for a seamless exit from high school to college entry by the way of a bridge or pathway program. These programs can be both mentally and physically strenuous for participants as they
traverse various hurdles with the goal of overcoming barriers that could have an impact on early college experiences and thwarting negative experiences (Slade et al., 2015). Geared towards the transition to college for first-time, first-year, often labeled at-risk students, they offer programmatic academic and social support to help students become better acquainted with resources and to build a connection to the institution (Maggio et al., 2005). Often serving as an early alert or intervention program, summer bridge programs can have a profound impact on institutional retention efforts by supporting historically underrepresented and often academically at-risk students. In the subsections below I discuss how the summer bridge programs support retention efforts, and the academic and social advantages for underrepresented student populations.

**Impact on Institutional Retention**

Institutions have a vested interest in understanding the needs of incoming student demographics. Duranczyk, Higbee and Lundell (2004) have noted that early detection impacts on the likelihood of success by implementing early intervention and support efforts for at-risk students who enroll from historically underserved backgrounds. Oftentimes, incoming students have no control over pre-existing historical events and demographics that have shaped their past and may be impactful for their future interactions while in college. Supporting these students in a summer bridge program can improve a desired outcome for college graduation. In order for the programs to be as effective as possible, they need top down support from administration, faculty, and staff to identify students early on who have a high potential to drop out (Duranczyk et al., 2004). Early identification and integration of high-need historically underserved students into the campus culture through summer bridge programs help them build positive associations with the campus community and they feel more connected and engaged. This engagement helps students
develop confidence in their academic and social skills by interacting with faculty, mentors, students, and peers in the classroom setting, attend office hours, eat in the dining halls, and become more familiarized with campus.

Some programs build in study hall, research programs, course credit, tutoring, and library workshops geared towards aiding in the students’ successful transition and ongoing matriculation at college. Students are also often introduced to support services and programs and attend workshops from various campus departments such as Student Financial Services, Career Services, Academic Success Centers, and Student Life. In addition to campus departments, some campuses require participants to interact and build relationships with administrators and other stakeholders who may have a vested interest in their success or can relate by being an ally or a member of similar historically underserved groups (Slade et al., 2015, p. 132).

**Summer Bridge Programs and Underrepresented Students**

Historically underrepresented students often bring with them to college many intersecting backgrounds and characteristics that may affect the likelihood of dropping out. These characteristics include “family background, socio-economic status, parent education levels, parental expectations, precollege schooling experiences, and others—that affect how well they persist. For the most part, students cannot change historical and other factors that create their personal and academic profile” (Slade et al., 2015). Since students cannot change what they bring with them to college, institutions need to focus on acclimatizing them to the collegiate environment. Many traditional students come to college with the social and cultural capital to understand how to transition into college life. Their parents understand the college-going process and how to interact with faculty, financial aid offices, and other areas. Many students from historically underserved backgrounds need a roadmap to be able to better understand collegiate
expectations and the demands of the academic and social aspects of college life. Summer bridge programs provide that roadmap for these students.

Some research has viewed these students from a deficit based thinking model, which means they are seen through a lens that focuses on what is broken and the difficulties of overcoming weaknesses. Many summer bridge programs, however, view students coming from a historically underrepresented background as having assets and strengths that can add to the campus climate (Slade et al., 2004; Duranczyk et al., 2004). Slade et al. (2004) have reported that these programs have more successful outcomes than those that try to change the student versus valuing the individual characteristics and strengths that they bring with them to college. While strength based models focus on the skills that students bring with them to college, their academic and social skills can be enhanced by participating in comprehensive summer bridge programs.

Zhang and Smith (2011) have demonstrated that comprehensive summer bridge programs have proven to be most effective in the impact made towards underrepresented students because, in addition to offering academic skill development, they also focus on soft and social skill development. This feature aids in transitional and collegiate success. In addition, Slade et al., (2015) have expressed the importance of identifying and researching programmatic efficacy, which, in turn, could enhance both cognitive and soft skills development for underrepresented students, support student persistence, and positively impact on retention.

Summer bridge programs have proven to help students make an early commitment to the institution, which impacts on retention. Duranczyk et al. (2004) have reported that the most effective qualities of summer bridge programs for underrepresented students are clear student outcomes, an active learning environment, high programmatic goals, social opportunities with the same and different peer groups, student identity development opportunities, and the mutual
support of faculty, staff, and administration. In addition to the social aspects of bridge programs, academic success workshops such as study skills, time management, and goal setting help students prepare for college (Strayhorn, 2014). All of these processes and pre-college workshops help students form affinity groups, enhance self-esteem, increase motivation, and develop a positive identity associated with the academic domains of college life.

National statistics show that approximately 40% and 49% of African American and Hispanic student, respectively, graduate from four-year institutions within six years. These figures compare to 57% of traditional students. Engagement for the African American and Hispanic students has been linked to positive integration and increased graduation rates (Strayhorn, 2014; Kuh et al., 2007; Aud, Hussar, Snyder, Bianco, Fox, Frohlich, Kemp, & Drake, 2010). Duranczyk and associates (2004) have argued that summer bridge programs can also assist minority students that are academically gifted by helping them understand how to balance academic, social, and athletic related activities. The majority of research conducted on summer bridge programs has focused on students’ lack of preparedness to tackle college level work. However, academically gifted minority students also often find themselves challenged during the first couple of semesters at college.

Conclusion

Retention is a top priority for institutional stakeholders. Improving retention rates among historically underrepresented students is imperative so that society can benefit from an educated diverse democracy (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Research has indicated that summer bridge programs have a positive influence on student persistence among historically underrepresented student populations. Programs that provide early identification of at-risk students and help them transition through academic, personal, and social integration are the most impactful for these
student groups. These programs allow students to build community and affinity groups early in their academic process. The students’ connections to campus resources and support are, thus, strengthened, which benefits both academically at-risk and high-achieving, first-generation, low-income, and students of color. Summer bridge programs break down barriers for student participants and often serve as institutional diversity initiatives to support the retention of students coming from historically underserved backgrounds.

**Self-efficacy and Historically Underrepresented Students**

Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) describes self-efficacy as an individual’s belief in their own ability to manage and carry out actions to achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy has also been linked to positive student performance and is an important tool that exists in the overarching framework of SCT (Gilson et al., 2012). Personal self-efficacy regulates motivation, goal attainment, influences confidence, and enhances self-beliefs whether positive or negative (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996). Most research pertaining to self-efficacy and minority students has considered academic self-efficacy and its correlation to retention rates (D’Lima, Winsler, & Kitsantas, 2014). Thomas (2014) has described academic self-efficacy as the ability to complete school related tasks. When students have positive classroom encounters, positive academic self-efficacy has been linked to student persistence.

Although past studies have examined academic self-efficacy, this research area is barren when trying to understand the experiences of the impact that summer bridge programs have on self-efficacy and retention. Participation in pre-college summer bridge programs among historically underrepresented students have been linked to having a positive impact on academic skill enhancement and perceived self-efficacy (Slade et al., 2015). Booth et al. (2013) have
acknowledged that although the students in that research study recognized how they arrived at college motivated, they needed additional support in order to attain critical achievement.

Although there are a limited number of articles related to self-efficacy and the experiences of historically underserved students in summer bridge programs, self-efficacy is an active contributor to motivation (Bandura, 1997). Rodgers and Summers (2008) have compared the motivational factors of African American students who attend PWIs to those who attend HBCUs. The results indicated that despite having higher levels of motivation upon enrollment, African American students at PWIs had lower self-concepts during their first semester and institutions needed to provide additional support programs for Black students in order to have a positive impact on self-efficacy, goal setting, and academic performance (Gilson et al., 2012). African American students also face additional racial challenges pertaining to academic self-efficacy. High-achieving Black students are sometimes perceived as being “not Black” enough and they are challenged with the quandary of having to assimilate to social and cultural norms in order to increase their self-efficacy to correlate with positive academic performance (D’Lima et al., 2014). Choi (2005) has noted that first-generation students enter college with lower perceived self-efficacy, have higher doubts in their own success, ability, and potential as college students, which adds undue stress and pressure during their first semester in college, and are more likely to drop out before the end of the first semester. It was recommended that they garner support through peer mentor programs and workshops that can help them develop their identity early on during their undergraduate experience to improve their self-efficacy.

It is important to consider the arguments of the critics of self-efficacy and SCT. Gilson et al. (2012) have argued that some research using SCT or self-efficacy specifically omits relevant data interpretations. They have also noted that experiencing self-doubt aids in the development
of self-efficacy. When students are motivated to learn, they may be more confident in performing the skill next time, with a concomitant expected increase in self-efficacy. Overall, SCT and self-efficacy has been researched in many social areas, however, more research is needed on the experiences of historically underserved student populations in higher education that extends beyond academic self-efficacy to further examine social and collective efficacy.

**Collective Efficacy and Historically Underrepresented Students**

Utilizing the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory, the experiences of low-income, first-generation, ethnic minority students is assessed to determine the programs’ impact on self-efficacy for first-year students. Rooted in self-efficacy, collective efficacy is a group of people’s common belief in the shared power to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1997). Research has linked it to enhancing group performance and it was recommended that more research should be conducted to analyze its influence on group affiliations among college academia (Alavi, & McCormick, 2008). Higher educational institutions are social systems comprised of many interconnected networks of faculty, staff, students, and administrators working towards helping students achieve a college diploma. None of the individual entities work independently and they all share a common belief geared towards student success.

As it relates to historically underserved student experiences, research in this area is scarce. It is important to add to the body of literature to understand the impact that collective efficacy has on student persistence and retention. Suzuki et al. (2012) have observed that first-year students are more successful when they feel connected to the campus community and have peer social support (Thomas, 2014). Rodgers and Summers’ (2008) research has delineated social support systems and the need to measure in group fit among minority students in predominately white Greek organizations versus cultural organizations. They found that there
were positive correlations to developing a sense of belongingness when enclaves were formed, or strong peer group connections were made. Thomas (2014) has also posited that students who worked in groups, developed close friendships, and were collectively encouraged often had better GPAs, leading researchers to determine that peer group influence directly impacts on academic performance. There is a gap in academic research on collective efficacy and historically underrepresented students. The existing literature focuses on community and teacher education programs developing a sense of belonging and engagement towards desired outcomes that are factors that contribute to collective efficacy, which is an aspect of human agency.

**Conclusion**

Persistence and retention have been linked to positive academic self-efficacy and motivation. Students who have lower self-efficacy are more likely to drop out before the end of the first semester. More research is necessary to understand how summer bridge programs impact the development of self-efficacy beyond the academic realm for historically underrepresented students. Although research on self-efficacy focuses on individual outcomes, people often work as social units and this collective work is insightful for group functions (Lent, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2005). As it relates to collective efficacy, students who are affiliated and connected through group engagement and interaction have a stronger connection to their institutions and have higher academic and social awareness. Booth and associates (2013) have noted that informal study groups, peer networks, and other group connections provide comprehensive support for student collegiate experiences. Some research exists that has demonstrated the positive impact that group associations have on college student experiences. However, there is a need to add to the body of literature pertaining to the experiences that
historically underrepresented students face and the impact that collective efficacy from participating in a summer bridge program has on their success.

**Summary**

The underrepresentation of certain groups in higher education is due to the segregated historical underpinnings of race, class, and socio-economic background, which have impacted on access and retention for underserved groups. Post-secondary institutions were founded and institutionalized for privileged white males and it was not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that higher education was legally mandated to become integrated (Flores & Park, 2013). The diversification of higher education allowed for more racially and ethnically diverse populations to attend and graduate from college. Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the number of institutions serving minority students has grown from 414 in the 1980s to at least 1,200 by 2004 (Flores & Park, 2013). Although enrollment numbers have increased, institutional efforts to support historically underrepresented student success and retention varies depending on institution type and programmatic efforts to serve a diverse student population.

In today’s college-going market, diversity initiatives are the cornerstones of collegiate platforms, however, disparities among groups are still present and efforts to support underrepresented students are still relevant. Entrance exam scores for historically underrepresented minority students still lag far behind the scores for White students and minority students face additional social challenges when attending PWIs (May & Chubin, 2003; Zander, Mack, Aviles, Corkery, Shettel, Prabhu, & Shibley, 2013). However, low-income, minority, and first-generation students also bring a wealth of diverse experiences to college with them and the intersectionality of their high-need categories provides them with various levels of resilience, grit, motivation, and determination that drives them to succeed once enrolled.
In order to support student success and improve graduation rates, institutions are taking on more early identification approaches towards better preparing at-risk students for college transition through summer bridge programs. These early alert programs are comprehensive in nature and positively correlates with the ability to helping students persist in the first semester of college. They take on a holistic approach towards developing transition, academic, and social skills geared towards helping students persist. By allowing students to come to campus early prior to classes begin, they begin to build community early and bond as a group which impacts engagement and interaction among peer groups thus affirming a positive experience that aids student persistence. Therefore, based on the literature presented, summer bridge programs make a positive impact on historically underrepresented student success and retention by helping students successfully transition to college and improve their self-efficacy and build group relationships that can positively impact their persistence.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The aims of research in this particular doctoral program was to examine a complex problem of practice, generate knowledge from data gathered at the research site, and provide context and strategies for introducing systemic change to help resolve the problem of practice. The purpose of this research study with first-generation, low-income, and racial and ethnic minority students in a summer bridge program was to understand how they made meaning of their first semester experience after participating in a pre-college summer bridge program. The research question this study sought to answer was: How do historically underserved students make meaning of their participation in a pre-college summer bridge program while enrolled in their first semester at a private, predominantly White liberal arts institution? Collecting data that sheds light on the research participant’s experiences with self-efficacy was a primary goal and their experiences with collective efficacy was the sub-goal of the study. This study was motivated by Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT), which identifies how the mutual interactions between behavior, person, and environment influence a person’s self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The study directly explores the agentic perspective of SCT (Bandura, 2001). This chapter discusses the reasoning for using a qualitative research approach, identifies the research participants, discusses the procedure for collecting data, and concludes with how the researcher addresses criteria for conducting quality qualitative research.

Qualitative Research Approach

This study utilized a qualitative research method in order to understand the research problem. Farber (2006) has explained the need for researchers to discern between utilizing a quantitative versus qualitative research method in order to best serve the research question. It is necessary to collect, analyze, and interpret data whether you use a quantitative or a qualitative
method (Ponterotto, 2005). However, it is important for researchers to associate the method of study to the research question. By investigating the research question in greater depth, beyond survey responses with a high volume of participants, the researcher was able to have more dialogue with participants that allowed the researcher to describe and interpret fundamental issues for the research participants in a specific setting (Farber, 2006). This approach allowed the findings to be presented from the voice of the participant in identifying the experience or phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005). The research question in this study enabled a deeper level of exploration beyond numerical values typically associated with quantitative methods. In addition to identifying the research method, it is also necessary to elaborate on the specific research paradigm used to approach the research study (Ponterotto, 2005). This study utilized the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which is further discussed in the following section, together with the research methodology.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was selected based on the researcher’s philosophical alignment with its assumptions. Proponents of this paradigm focus on understanding the “lived experiences” of the research participants. In qualitative studies, knowledge is constructed socially and Ponterotto (2005) has distinguished the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm as one that incorporates interaction between the researcher and the participants in order to examine how real experiences hold true for the participants. Because the researcher and the participants interact in a meaningful way, deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be co-constructed in the research findings.

The aim of the research study was to understand how historically underserved students made sense of their summer bridge experience and how their involvement in this program
impacted on their self-efficacy during their first semester in college. In addition to exploring their individual experiences, this research study also explored group experiences and the collective efficacy of the cohort as they interacted during their first semester. The nature of knowledge or the means of understanding in qualitative studies have derived from social constructionism that focuses on sense-making (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This helped the researcher best comprehend how to approach and develop research questions to understand the experience of the research participants. First-time, first-year, first-generation, low-income, and minority students who participated in a summer bridge program were the research participants, and, therefore they were the units of analysis for this research study. The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was utilized to make meaning of the research participants’ experiences. A more in-depth discussion of the research methodology follows, including a discussion of why IPA was chosen, who the research participants were, why they were chosen, and a step by step guide to the data collection process.

Methodology

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative research approach where the role of the researcher is to focus on the participant’s perceptions and interpret their experiences by making sense of their described interactions and occurrences (Smith et al., 2009). This particular approach aligns with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm because both the approach and the paradigm focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the research participants by bringing meaning to the actual accounts of their involvements (Smith et al., 2009; Ponterotto, 2005). The IPA method originated in the psychological discipline and focuses on the experiential and experimental role of the research participants (Smith et al., 2009). It is also influenced by phenomenology, which is a philosophical approach to studying the content and true meaning of
the whole person’s experience in his or her own personal terms (Smith et al., 2009; Forrester, 2010; Connelly, 2010).

Within IPA, two sub-approaches are available that help the phenomenologist analyze their research participants through distinct, but somewhat overlapping, lenses: descriptive and interpretative, which are also known as hermeneutics. Descriptive approaches bracket the researcher’s bias out of the research study to allow him or her to be able to truly understand the phenomenon and not affect the study (Connelly, 2010). Interpretative approaches assert that the researcher’s perspective should be acknowledged and they cannot be bracketed out or put aside because they are a part of the researcher’s experience. This is referred to as a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of how the participants are making sense of the said phenomenon of study (Smith et al., 2009). In this approach the researcher’s perspective comes second to those provided by the participants and the researcher can only account for the participant’s experience once the participant has acknowledged this said truth (Smith et al., 2009). Whether descriptive or interpretive, reflection for researcher and participant is critical in both approaches (Connelly, 2010).

The IPA method is also idiographic, which means that the researcher wants to examine all aspects of the participant’s experience and what is happening when they are involved in the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Because the purpose is to understand single experiences in depth, it is common practice for IPA studies to have small participant sizes (Connelly, 2010). This allows for the researcher to become deeply engrossed with the data collection process (Smith et al., 2009) with an intended outcome of exploring in detail the experiences in order to analyze comparisons among participants. This can shed light on individual student accounts of their experiences of participating in the summer bridge program. Data collected was used to
compare similarities and differences in how students believed the programs and workshops
attended during the pre-college program had shaped their first semester experiences.

This strategy was appropriate because most research currently conducted at the research
site in relation to the grant is quantitative data that explores the demographic and academic data
comparisons across groups of the summer bridge program versus non-participants. Utilizing an
IPA approach provided qualitative data by providing institutional stakeholders with experiential
first-hand accounts of the participant’s experiences which added value to the existing
quantitative institutional data that has already been gathered. Being selected to participate in the
summer bridge program is a very important step for newly admitted historically underserved
students, and it is a very selective process where about 30% of the applicants are admitted into
the program. Since the topic is relevant and matters to the participants, it lends itself well to an
IPA research study (Forrester, 2010).

Utilizing IPA shaped the type of research questions asked. Epistemological by position,
IPA studies focus on asking open ended research questions so that participants are able to speak
about their understanding of their experiences openly with the researcher. Although open ended
questions allow the researcher the ability to hear about the participant’s experiences, a challenge
to asking these sort of questions is not knowing when they have been answered (Smith et al.,
2009). The solution is to have realizable objectives so that the researcher understands when the
participant has answered the research questions (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants

In IPA studies, researchers identify homogeneous sample sizes with a small number of
participants (Smith et al., 2009). This study included semi-structured interviews conducted in
person with six historically underserved students who participated in a pre-college summer bridge program at a small private liberal arts institution in the south east. Smith et al. (2009) have argued that it is more difficult utilizing IPA when the sample is too large and a small sample size is ideal and aligns with the research approach. Other researchers who have used this approach on summer bridge participants had sample sizes ranging between 5–12 participants. Since student participants in this summer bridge program may encounter several intersecting identities, it was determined to sample six participants to gain a well-rounded view of the individual student experiences. Participants were actively engaged in their first semester in college. This allowed them to experience the academic and social aspects of college life, which allowed them to describe the impact of the summer bridge program on their self-efficacy.

These students came from one or more of the following demographic groups: first-generation, low-income, and racial or ethnic minority. They were first-time, full-time, college students coming directly from high school with an age range of 18–19 years of age. Both males and females were included in the study and all racial and ethnic groups are included depending on the intersectionality of other high-need categories of the research participant. For example, a Caucasian student could also be low-income and first-generation and would be able to apply and participate in the summer bridge program as a member of historically underserved groups. Although these students are members of a perceived privileged racial background, their socio-economic challenges and lack of social and cultural capital through not having parents attend college presents additional barriers to their college persistence, which may impact on institutional retention of student members of this group.

Purposeful homogeneous sampling was utilized in order for the researcher to gain
insight into the research questions without having to test out views and probability of a random sample of people who may not have encountered the shared experience that is being studied (Smith et al., 2009). All six of the research participants applied to and participated in the 2017 summer bridge program. This aligns their interests and they had a shared experience that they were able to discuss during the interview process.

Student recruitment followed the steps listed below:

1. The researcher sent an email (see appendix A) to all first-time, full-time, first semester enrolled, summer bridge program participants at the research site of the study. Students who were interested in participating in the research study were asked to respond directly to the researcher.

2. As participants responded, the researcher sent a personalized email (see appendix B), within 48 hours, to all students who wanted to participate in the research study. This email described the research study in more detail and included the consent form and the interview guide (see appendices C and D). At this time, the researcher and participant arranged an initial meeting and any additional questions were answered prior to agreement.

3. No follow-up emails were sent to participants. Since the researcher works at the institution where recruiting took place, a follow-up email to recruit was not allowed since it could appear coercive.

A discussion of the research procedures and anticipated data analysis follows.

**Procedures**

By utilizing purposeful sampling, individuals were selected who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). During the interview process participants
were asked research questions that provided the researcher with more information on how they made meaning of their summer bridge experiences. The procedures section is based directly on the research questions and research design. This section discusses how the data was collected based on the questions of interest beginning with the data analysis procedures.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain permission to conduct research through gaining approval from the site location’s institutional review board (IRB) (Creswell, 2012). Upon approval, the researcher began the data collection process in three steps. First, an initial meeting was arranged with the participant to build rapport, collect biographical information (appendix E), describe the research study, and answer questions. Second, the participants were contacted and asked to participate in a 45–60 minute in-depth interview with each participant. Interviews took place on campus at a safe, mutually agreed upon location that provided a private and quiet setting so that the student could feel comfortable sharing their experience and that it could be recorded free of background noise. The interview was recorded electronically with the permission of the participants. The interview guide (appendix D) was semi-structured with open ended questions. The researcher took notes, prompted participants, encouraged students to be descriptive, was an active listener, and asked follow-up questions (Smith et al., 2009). Data was transcribed by a professional transcription company: Rev.com. Third, the participants were provided with a copy of the transcript in order to make sure that what had been documented was accurate and they also had the possibility of adding to their original responses. During this phase, the interviewer provided the transcript and followed-up with the participants via email to see if they wanted to add anything to their original responses to
fulfill the member checking process (Smith et al., 2009). Following are the steps involved in how the researcher conducted the analysis of the qualitative data.

Once transcripts were received they were reviewed individually while utilizing the data analysis process described by Smith et al. (2009) and Shaw (2010). During this process the researcher followed five steps that allowed for the initial interpretation of the participants’ experiences, followed by finding themes across the cases. Steps one through four analyzed the individual cases in order to understand the essence of the individual participant’s experience in the summer bridge program. The entire process allowed for the researcher to be involved in the analysis process by constantly reviewing the data, while also identifying emergent themes, which is an inductive and iterative process (Smith et al., 2009). Step five used deductive reasoning, which was applied once the data had been analyzed to determine if any of the themes were consistent with or divergent from Bandura’s agentic perspective of SCT (2001). The agentic perspective asserts that agents are individuals who intentionally make things happen through their own abilities and actions, which is also known as self-efficacy. The five steps involved in this data analysis are described below in greater detail.

Step one involved reading and re-reading the transcripts from the first interview (Smith et al., 2009). Although a professional transcription service was utilized, the researcher listened to the audio recording while reading through the transcripts individually. This helped the researcher imagine and hear the voices of the participants and enter their world during the re-reading process. Smith et al. (2009) has noted that this step helps the participant become the center of the analysis while bracketing out any personal biases.

Step two began the initial noting phase. This was where the researcher conducted a line-by-line analysis and began to code the data (Smith et al., 2009). During this step, the researcher
focused on the essence of what the participant said about their experience while maintaining authenticity to the explicit meaning discussed in the individual interview. The researcher became familiar with the transcript by making notes, exploring comments, breaking down content, and began formulating descriptive comments through the creation of codes that were written in the left-hand margin of the transcript (Shaw, 2010). The most important aspect of step two was paying attention to what the participant said, how they said it, and other language they used to express themselves, being mindful of diction, pauses, linguistics, conceptual comments, and expression in order to interpret the meaning of the participants’ responses.

In step three the researcher explored emergent themes by reducing the amount of details gained from interview note taking and notations marked on the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). This process involved working with the notes taken on the transcript versus working with the transcript itself. Here the researcher began to cluster emergent themes by identifying patterns and connections that were important to the participants by using the codes developed in step two. During this step the researcher had to be comfortable with the manifestation of the hermeneutic process, which involved getting farther away from the participant and now involved more of the researcher’s insight. The researcher made meaning of the participant making meaning of the phenomenon under study (Smith et al., 2009).

Step four required the researcher to search for connections across emergent themes. This process may involve mapping out and analyzing how all of the themes fit together. Keeping an open mind was an integral part in this step for the researcher. As the process became more interpretative, one had to consider repetition or emphasis that is placed on certain experiences in order to fully capture the participant’s experience (Smith et al., 2009). This process involved
chunking of the data in meaningful ways as they aligned with the research question (Shaw, 2010).

Step five began with bracketing all assumptions and biases from the previous analysis as the researcher transitioned to the next transcript. After all interviews were analyzed, the researcher looked for patterns across all cases (Smith et al., 2009). This involved identifying shared experiences and expressed perspectives where all participants had a common experience. The researcher reflected on the agentic perspective of SCT (Bandura, 2001) and viewed how themes emerged from this study correlated to the theoretical framework that guides the key findings discussion.

Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research

The following section focuses on ethical considerations, the credibility, transferability, self-reflexivity and transparency of this research study while also identifying the study’s limitations.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2013) has stated that researchers must be sensitive to research participants and utilize language that reduces bias in the study to maintain a level of ethical standards. Participant identities were protected by utilizing pseudonyms, which they selected at the onset of the initial interview. All audio recordings, interview transcripts, electronic notes, and participants’ actual names were stored on a password protected personal laptop. Back up files were stored on an external hard drive and securely locked with any physical documents such as interview notes, reflective journal, and consent forms in a file cabinet.

Credibility, Transferability, and Transparency
Credibility and trustworthiness is important to establish because it indicates a quality study (Shaw, 2010). This is established by providing the reader with clarity on the research steps from data collection to writing up results. Since most of the research for this study was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, the researcher provided the participants with an opportunity to review transcripts and provide feedback through the member checking process. Member checking helps establish an authentic account of the participant’s experience and it plays a pivotal role in creating trustworthiness for the results and findings in a research study (Smith et al., 2009). The participants had the opportunity to provide more information about their experience during follow-up emails with the researcher during the member checking phase. In addition to collecting information through interviews and keeping a reflective journal, memos that the researcher kept also served as a data triangulation source when the process necessitated the need for gathering themes and quotations from the participants. These aspects all added to the credibility and transferability to the research study. Maintaining a reflective journal during the data collection and analysis process helped the researcher document thoughts, trace procedural decisions, and maintain an audit trail to show how the researcher got from collecting data to presenting the actual results (Shaw, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). This supported the trustworthiness and transparency of the research study.

Self-reflexivity

The researcher’s interest in this topic was grounded in her personal identity as a first-generation, minority, low-income student while enrolled in post-secondary education and, now, as a professional working with historically underserved students within her role as a higher education professional. The first in her family to go to college, the researcher experienced first-hand accounts on the difficulties of transitioning from high school to college without institutional
support. The researcher is personally familiar with and professionally invested in student self-efficacy and in supporting historically underrepresented students to achieve their goals to graduate from college.

The researcher must be mindful of the challenges as well as the strengths that the participants bring with them to college. Institutional culture and climate play pivotal roles in their college-going experience and self-efficacy development. Analysis from this research used excerpts from the transcripts focusing on the participants’ experience. Extensive direct quotes and block excerpts from their transcripts are used so that the reader can see a trail from the transcript to the findings. This process underscores the researcher’s intent of ruling out her own bias in reporting out findings from this study.

**Limitations**

As an IPA study that was idiographic, the research intended to reflect the experiences of six participants who experienced attending the summer bridge program. This allowed for an individual in-depth examination of a single participant’s experience involved in the phenomenon under examination. This presented a limitation for the study as the results were not generalizable to larger populations of historically underserved students and were limited to the specific experiences of the students in this research study at a small private liberal arts institution. Their experiences should not be understood as representing reality for all first-generation, low-income, minority students. For example, the experiences of self-efficacy during the first semester of college for historically underrepresented students who attend a summer bridge program at a historically Black college or university (HBCU) may look very different. Secondly, this study focused on participants who were able to engage in a pre-college summer bridge program at a private institution. These programs are designed to support college transition. The experiences of
these participants may not be transferable to students at other institutions or to historically underserved students who do not participate in these programs. Lastly, participants were in the process of their second semester in college and reflected on how the summer bridge program impacted on their first semester experience, which may overlap with their overall experience as college students. Therefore, the data collected may vary and could be challenging for identifying cross-case themes. A summary of the research design follows.

Summary

This study explored the experiences of first-generation, low-income, minority students who participated in a pre-college summer bridge program. The IPA methodology was utilized to give voice to participants and make sense of their experiences during their first semester in college as it relates to Bandura’s theoretical framework of the agentic perspective of SCT. Inductive reasoning was primarily employed, and deductive strategies were applied once the data had been analyzed in order to make reference to student experiences with self-efficacy. Since IPA is idiographic by nature, the researcher followed necessary reasoning for controlling biases and bracketing during the analysis process. Overall, the constructivist-interpretivist approach and IPA, in particular, best captured the meaning of the participants’ experiences that had impacted on their experiences in the summer bridge program. This approach allows others to understand how the participants made meaning of their college experiences and assists in making an impact on institutional programs and services provided to historically underserved students.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this research study with first-generation, low-income, and racial and ethnic minority students in a summer bridge program was to understand how they made meaning of their first semester experience after participating in a pre-college summer bridge program. Six participants were interviewed for the study. The researcher explored the participants’ reflections on their first semester in college during the first month of their second semester term. Participants were asked to discuss their desire to participate in the summer bridge program, which provided context for their accounts. The participants also addressed other topics relating to their perception of their college enrollment as a historically underserved student and how they reacted when faced with challenges in their first semester.

The analysis of the interview data yielded three superordinate themes and seven subordinate themes. The superordinate and subthemes were acknowledged if the theme recurred in at least half of the research participants’ accounts. All six participants made statements relating to each superordinate theme. The superordinate themes and their subthemes were: 1) developing collegiate confidence (1.1 bridge program as the foundation of support and success, 1.2 diversity awareness and empowerment); 2) engaging academically and socially (2.1 social engagement, 2.2 academic engagement); and 3) identifying sources of motivation and support (3.1 intrinsic, 3.2 friends and family, 3.3 faculty and staff). Table 1 provides a list of the reoccurrence with each participant as it relates to superordinate and subordinate themes.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes Subthemes</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Bethany</th>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Tucker</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Developing collegiate confidence</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Bridge program as the foundation for support &amp; success</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Diversity awareness &amp; empowerment</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Engaging academically &amp; socially</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Time management</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Social engagement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Identifying sources of motivation &amp; support</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Intrinsic</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Friends &amp; family</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Faculty &amp; staff</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Developing Collegiate Confidence**

Being confident in one’s ability to successfully transition from high school to college is important for first semester success, outcomes, and completion. For many students coming from low-income, first-generation, or minority backgrounds, this transition can be difficult because they lack social and cultural capital that can support successful high school to college transition. The first superordinate theme that emerged in the research study portrays participants’ initial areas of angst and hope as they transitioned from high school to college. Confidence in this case referred to how comfortable each participant was with taking on collegiate coursework and expectations after completing one week in the summer bridge program, transitioning into the semester, and completing the first semester of college. The researcher found two areas that all participants experienced while developing collegiate confidence. First, participants expressed that the bridge program played a significant role in their first semester success by helping them identify resources, tools, and strategies for being a successful college student. Further, they
developed increased confidence by forming early affinity groups with diverse pupils. They also found being around others from similar backgrounds was empowering and it inspired them to speak up about their backgrounds during class discussions over the course of the semester. Thus, the two subthemes discussed here are: bridge program as the foundation for support and success and diversity awareness and empowerment.

**Bridge Program as the Foundation for Support and Success**

In their accounts, all six participants stated their participation in the summer bridge program was the foundation for their first semester underpinning for success and understanding how to traverse college life. All research participants said applying to college was stressful and they decided to apply to the summer bridge program because they felt the need for early acclimation, enhanced study tips, and getting to know people prior to classes beginning. All students meeting Title III high-needs criteria received an application link and it was an individual’s choice whether to apply to the program. Marisol explained her initial choice to participate in the program was to mitigate a hectic transition with the general freshman move in day. After reading the program description she reflected on how participating could not only allow her to move to campus early, but could also help her develop more college readiness skills:

I just wanted to move in earlier than everyone else, because I just didn’t really like the disorganization that I would see. Then, I saw in the description that there’s workshops that would help you be ready for college, and I realized in high school I wasn’t sure if I was going to be ready for college just straight out of high school. And belonging to a summer bridge program, I felt like it would help me out a little bit more, and see if there’s anything that I’m missing, which there was a lot of stuff that I was missing that happened in high school that I didn’t learn for college…
Marisol was content with her decision to participate and realized the workshops were the foundation for building her collegiate confidence and learning about metacognition by building relationships with faculty early in her academic career:

I’m happy that I went to those workshops, and I was excited for the summer bridge program because I wanted to see if there was anything that I missed in high school. It was literally everything that I missed, almost everything. So, actually belonging to a summer bridge program with actual professors that want to teach students, like, “Hey, this is high school but backwards. You have to understand. You can’t memorize. You have to learn to write your own paper, not write what the teacher wants you to write.” So, I’m glad that I went to [the program] because of that.

Here Marisol discussed the impact that learning from a faculty member early in her college experience and understanding the difference between high school and college expectations and the effect this had on her confidence.

Similarly, Coach discussed the difference between high school and college and what he learned from the summer bridge program that aided his first semester success. He was mostly impacted by the study skill, professional communication, and networking workshops noting:

I study more than I did in high school. So that’s good, just gotta figure out how to generate my study into my quizzes and tests.

So, although he was studying more and felt more prepared, he did not believe the amount of studying translated into the grades he earned in his exams. Over the course of the semester, he regrouped and reflected on communicating and networking in order to be successful. He then turned to campus resources such as tutoring, academic advising, and utilizing faculty office
hours to support his study efforts resulting in a successful first semester. He mentioned having to
grow during his first semester and said he is even more confident starting out on the second
semester:

> My studying, I’m using that in all classes trying to be ahead this semester, which is
> working out great, I’m ahead. I just studied a little thing so I can be extra prepared for
> those quizzes and tests.

This shows that he not only applied concepts and lessons learned in the first semester, but he is
building upon them and applying them each semester to aid in his collegiate success.

In addition to developing college readiness and study success skills, the bridge program
also helped students establish relationships with faculty, friends, and mentors, gain a sense of
belonging, and acclimate to college life early, which had an impact on their first semester
experiences. Tucker was very pleased with his participation in the program stating:

> I mean obviously getting to know the campus was one advantage that I enjoyed before
everyone got here, but I don’t know if I would have made the friendships that I would
have made if I wouldn’t have came to this program. I still talk to every one of them, and
whether I’m closer friends with others than the other ones, I still talk to the majority of
them, and honestly if we have a class together or usually if we just need help, it’s usually
we end up turning to each other and asking for help, I’ve noticed.

The bridge program not only supported his academic transition, but it was the foundation for the
development of an affinity group among historically underserved students at a PWI. As a first-
generation low-income White male, Tucker presents as a student who would historically come
from an affluent privileged background. However, the bridge program provided him with an
early support system of likeminded peers who understood the challenge of not having a knowledgeable support system prior to enrollment. This indicates that, after attending the program, bridge participants were more knowledgeable about college success and they used each other as a network of support when they were challenged in classes or needed someone to talk to that they were comfortable with.

This bond that Tucker experienced in the program is also noted in other accounts. Peter said he was initially nervous about coming to college because it was a new environment, but joining clubs and making friends early helped him be “more confident, not as nervous about how people will see me.” And Bethany discussed her experience with the program, which provides a great summary for how many other participants felt about attending the summer bridge program:

I loved it. It was so much fun. I learned so much on time management, stress, and what to do when coming to college. I already knew the buildings and stuff a week before everyone else, already comfortable coming here, and at first, I was nervous, because I didn’t know it was going to be such a small group of people. I thought it was going to be larger, so I was like, “How am I going to connect with people?” But with it being such a small group, it was really nice. They’re really like family now…I feel like the first semester would have been way more stressful for me, trying to figure out what I need to do, because I don’t know what I’m doing. My Mom doesn’t know what’s happening either. No one in my family, actually. I’m the first ever to go to college, so I had no background support. So, [the program] really was that for me. It was my backbone to succeeding the first semester, for sure.
Overall, participants were excited yet skeptical about attending the summer bridge program, but they applied because they expected to obtain information that would help them transition to college and become more successful their first semester. They were able to get to meet faculty, staff, peer mentors, and friends. Living on campus early and attending social and academic workshops supported their first semester success and engagement. They were able to identify campus resources, knew how to communicate effectively with faculty, and made lasting friendships. Student participants also enhanced their diversity awareness and became more empowered as a first-generation, low-income, or minority student while attending the bridge program. These experiences and accounts are shared below.

**Diversity Awareness and Empowerment**

Workshops, programs, and interactions during the bridge program coupled with applications and lessons learned through reinforcement during the semester increased participants’ diversity awareness. It also empowered them as historically underserved students, thus, adding meaning to how they developed collegiate confidence.

All except one participant stated that they became more aware of the diverse environment of higher education, as well as their own personal sense of diversity as a first-generation, low-income, or minority student. This sense of newfound awareness in the collegiate environment led to a display of empowerment and vocal concern for themselves and others from similarly situated backgrounds during their first semester. Several participants specifically expressed self-awareness, diversity awareness, empowerment, and one individual spoke directly on being a first-generation, low-income advocate in her classes. Being aware of diverse perspectives in higher education coupled with a sense of empowerment can be a great foundation for a sense of belonging and success for many underserved students at a PWI. Hannah’s experience working
through a group project was representative of a similar account by other participants reporting on increased diversity awareness and how to interact with peers from different backgrounds and interests. It was one of the results for her of attending the summer bridge program:

[The summer bridge program] was very tight-knit from the beginning, and required you to know these people, and work with these people from different backgrounds with different personalities that you might never have gone up to before, due to your first impression of maybe how someone looks, or how their personality seems to be. But it requires you to work with all these different people, no matter if you want to or not. I think that helped. That was the biggest lesson for me throughout this semester was just to be very open-minded towards people because you’re going to be very shocked with who you ... what their story is, and how they really are and act…I think [the program] helped me find ways to talk to them despite not having any common interests.

Here Hannah, a low-income majority student, shares how attending the program supported her awareness of diverse audiences. Program participants interacted in social teambuilding workshops that provided them with information on how to utilize their strengths to network, work on group projects, and step outside of their comfort zones in order to transition to college. By applying these concepts during her first semester Hannah, along with other participants, believed it supported their first semester success with valuing differences and speaking to others on diverse perspectives.

In this study, participating in diversity awareness workshops such as cultural walks and identity self-reflection programs supported all participants similar to Hannah’s account by giving them confidence to meet new people in social academic situation and better understand diverse
group dynamics. In addition to supporting their academic success, five out of six participants were from the intersectionality of minority and first-generation backgrounds and they experienced more personal experiences through encounters with diverse pupils that made them more aware of their underserved positionality at a private PWI. These students spoke directly to what it meant for them to be a minority student at a majority institution. This created a new lens on being aware of diversity in social situations. Some of these participants became more aware of their minority identity at a PWI and others were more empowered to speak out about their group and what it means to persevere against odds as a first-generation or minority student.

Marisol is a proud first-generation Hispanic student and she said, “Being Hispanic, appearances do matter at this school for being an ethnic person. So, it was “kind of hard.” In difficult times during the semester, she turned to the program coordinator of the bridge program to get support on how to deal with adverse issues pertaining to diversity on campus:

So, when I came to [the program coordinator] about a dilemma that I had with someone, she told me different perspectives about it. And from that I learned extremely well that you have to flip the coin in every situation. And that’s what keeps me going: looking at different perspectives, different views, and admiring diversity, and not just taking in your own identity. But because you have your own identity, why not learn other identities? And why not take in that conflict that happened? And once you accept that conflict, you definitely become stronger. Once you accept that, “Hey, this happened. So, what? We need to move on. I’m good. I can keep going.” That’s how you know you’ve overcome something. And most of the time I didn’t even know that I was becoming a stronger person. I was extremely when I went to go and talk to her. I was a very, extremely
sensitive girl. And I didn’t see as much strength in me as I do now. But after I talked to her I realized that I have strength now because she taught me how to look at different perspectives. Diversity is strength.

This portrays the importance of a diverse support system for historically underserved students during their first semester and how it can ripen collegiate assurance. Marisol was able to build a connection and relationship with the bridge program coordinator and felt comfortable speaking with her about a challenging time in her semester. From that conversation, Marisol was empowered to preserve and overcome that immediate obstacle. She grew through that moment and began to realize her own personal sense of diversity and subsequently correlated that to strength along with being empowered to understand diverse perspectives during conflict.

Coach is an African American first-generation male student and he experienced conflicting views and a nuanced experience when asked about his experience as a historically underserved student at a PWI. He spoke candidly about how some of his peers would look at him like he did not belong, however, he still felt welcome on campus:

I will say as part of my identity I see ... I wanna say as a minority aspect because as I was just walking around campus sometimes you just get them looks. I mean I don’t really say anything ’cause I mean I don’t like doing that, I don’t like doing drama or anything. And again, like in the classroom some freshers might be like, “Who’s this in the classroom, why are they just sitting there?” So, I try to push myself, to speak out more, that’s what I’m trying to work on more, participate more in class if I know the answer. Or stop being shy, just go for it and if you’re wrong, you’re wrong, just move on. Care what no one else thinks and like, “Show everyone that you’re smart.” Put it out there, don’t hide it
back…is like nobody cares you’re a minority ’cause with the sports teams and everybody getting along, they don’t judge you. Some people do, I mean that’s just how they are but it’s very few. But most of the people here they are really friendly with everybody, they don’t matter what you look like, where you came from, it’s just getting to know you, seeing if you’re a great person.

Coach notices that people look at him differently, however, he doesn’t respond verbally. However, in the classroom he is pushing himself to almost overcompensate for his minority status in order to prove or make a point and show people that he does belong. It is also noteworthy that he notices that White peers associate African American males to being on athletic teams, however, he is not a student athlete so that may add to him feeling pressure to excel academically and prove his worth as a first-generation minority male student. In the bridge program, students were strongly encouraged by faculty mentors to speak up and provide discussion points during class sessions so that their professors know who they are. Coach is displaying that he is utilizing tools learned from the summer bridge program to motivate himself in the classroom setting. These tools support his confidence since he is a shy person and, thus, he was empowered to be a strong academic advocate for African American males in diverse classroom settings.

After participating in the summer bridge program, Bethany was empowered to share her experience in an open forum with her classmates as a person from a low socio-economic background. She gained confidence to do so during her college transition week noting:

All of those exercises that worked with our strengths and identities to help us succeed in group projects and even socially and academically the first semester, really encouraged
me to stand out. I have my strengths. I’m not this weak person that is really quiet, and I’m smart, but I don’t want to express what I’m thinking. So, those exercises really helped me realize that I do have these strengths and I can use these strengths to really benefit us in these groups.

Similar to Coach, Bethany knows she is smart but typically doesn’t speak out. However, she reflects on the tools and knowledge acquired during the bridge program and she applied them in the scenario below:

I had an honors seminar, and in this class, as you know, it wasn’t more of assignments, but talking as a group and discussion, and a lot of the people in there, you could tell, were from a nice family background. This was paid for for them. They didn’t really have those struggles, and they would say bad things about people from my circumstance, like a single mother, my home, low-income family members, a certain percentage are most likely in jail or on drugs, and in those moments, I do stand up and I’m like, “No, that’s not how that is. From my personal experience, I’m here at [Southeastern University]. We work hard for what we do go for. There may be a correlation between the two, but it’s not a big correlation, and it’s a personality thing. It’s not based on your family. Yeah, your family mold you and your background mold you, but you can choose whether if you want to follow that path or if you make a new path.” So, in those circumstances, I do stand up and do talk about it, and even to other friends who say stuff or ask me questions, I’ll be honest with them, like, “I’m not ashamed of my background or being considered the low-income or poor or however you want to say it.” I do express it in that manner.
She felt as if she was a representative for her group identifying as a mixed race White, Native American, and Hispanic student. The programs and workshops that she attended during the bridge program not only inspired her to become more involved in classroom discussions but also empowered her to share her personal situation to help others understand individuals from lower income levels.

**Conclusion**

The first superordinate theme, developing collegiate confidence, exposed the importance of the summer bridge program and supporting first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority student transitions to college. The college application process was stressful yet rewarding because they were admitted into the college of their choice. Applying to the program was self-motivated as most of the participants wanted to get a first-hand approach to understanding the difference between high school and college by moving to campus early and participating in college readiness workshops.

Notably, knowledge gained from participation supported their first semester success. All participants articulated how the workshops helped them gain collegiate confidence in both academic and social settings. Having access to and building relationships with faculty mentors, peer mentors, and student support staff helped attendees identify campus resources so that they knew who and which departments to access during the semester when they needed assistance. One key element is the development of close, lasting friendships. Participants referred to each other as being members of a “family”. This represents a close bond where people identify with similarities although differences are present. Along with identifying differences, this superordinate theme also increased student’s diversity awareness and empowered some to speak
out against adversity as representatives of their “group” being a historically underserved student at a PWI.

**Engaging Academically and Socially**

Two key components of student success are academic and social engagement. Historically underserved students may have a challenging time balancing both academic and social environments in higher education in the absence of the guided structure that they may have been accustomed to in high school. The second superordinate theme that emerged in the research study portrays participants’ first semester experiences with balancing academic and social aspects of college life. Engagement in this case refers to how students participated and interacted with curricular, classroom, and academic aspects of college in comparison to the social out of class areas of college such as club or organization involvement, and their interactions within social arenas. As participants in the summer bridge program, students were coached on the importance of creating a balance between academic and social engagement. They were encouraged to find a routine that worked best for them with the understanding that it takes both to be a successful college student. The researcher found two areas that all participants experienced while engaging academically and socially. First, participants expressed how the bridge program played a significant role in their ability to focus on academic areas of college life when they planned accordingly. Further, academic engagement was an innate responsibility as each student felt it was their obligation to do well in college so that they could get a good job upon graduation. Although they were aware that it takes a combination of both academic and social engagement to be successful, many were challenged to create a balance between the two and lacked poor time management. Thus, it is important to discuss the variance of their experiences in the subthemes: time management and social engagement.
Time Management

All participants were engaged academically during their first semester and completed the semester in good academic standing. Participants grappled with time management and becoming more independent with their study habits without the constraints of a structured school day that they were familiar with in high school. Half of the participants were very organized and utilized their Passion Planners that they were provided with during the program to maintain a schedule, and the other half did not. In both instances, students still found it challenging to balance their time and not over commit either to the academic or social aspects of college life.

When asked about his first semester experience, Peter said he mostly had a problem with procrastinating because he no longer had his mother to urge him about homework and other academic responsibilities stating, “I have a problem with procrastination. That’s my biggest problem, and especially now that I was living by myself…it’s just a lot of responsibility.” Although he felt like he handled the semester “ok”, he felt like he could have done better by saying, “I think I handled it okay. I won’t say I did a great job, but it was better than it could have been. My grades didn’t really suffer because of the freedom and whatnot.” When asked how he applied what he learned in the summer bridge program to academic and social situations, Peter responded:

I know we had a time management session. I won’t say I utilized it very well because that’s something I have to work on a lot, but it’s a stepping stone. It’s progress, and I try. I started out the semester strong in my time management, but as it went on, I became lazier. I was very conscious of what I should be doing, and actually like do this, do this, do this, but as time goes on, it just happens, like slowly fall off a cliff. [A planner] seems like extra work, in a way. It is extra work, kind of, but it’s useful extra work. It helps you
remember stuff later on, but ... I also tried to do my homework earlier rather than later, at
the beginning of the semester, so I’d have free time to do new homework that they assign.
It’s also like I got lazier, so I wasn’t on top of it, so that’s why I fell off a cliff because
laziness is what happened.

Peter knew from time management and Passion Planning workshops that managing his time was
going to be an extremely important aspect to being successful in his first semester in college. His
statement shows that he started the semester off strong and applied lessons learned to managing
his academic and social aspects of life. However, as the semester progressed he became lazier
and procrastinated. Although he knew using a planner would better assist him with everyday
preparation, he failed to do so due to “laziness”. He associated planning and using a scheduler
with being “useful extra work” but he made a conscious decision to not use one even if it would
have lessened the mental burden of trying to remember homework deadlines. Like Peter, Hannah
also procrastinated but pulled through at the end of the semester:

Well, I procrastinated so much. I knew it was going to happen because that was me
throughout high school. But I definitely started ... it ended on a good note. I was able to
catch myself more throughout the semester than I would usually do in high school. I
didn’t want to get called out in front of all these other people, like 20-year-olds who are
in these classes. It was so embarrassing.

Hannah began the semester procrastinating and not using her planner. Once she was faced with
challenges in her courses that she needed to be well prepared for, she began to manage her time
better and had a good semester.
Unlike Peter and Hannah who used their planners sporadically during the semester, Tucker utilized his planner more often but still managed to endure challenges with maintaining effective time management resulting in him not getting the grade he desired in one of his courses:

I guess with my pre-cal class, I ended up making a grade that I was not pleased with, but it wasn’t just that I didn’t have time to study, it was that I didn’t really click with that certain professor. I guess between that and just other time management that I had to deal with, I ended up not making a grade that I wanted to in there.

This represents how participants knew the importance of using their planners but did not use them as often as they should, which created undue pressure and stressors that affected their ability to earn the grades they wanted.

Other students did utilize their planners more often and focused on upcoming deadlines. Bethany’s account is an example of how she and others similarly posited used their Passion Planner to stay on top of assignments. In addition, Bethany also acknowledged the use of her planner helped her manage stress and keep track of her goals:

The Passion Planner I’ve been using a lot, actually, because I have goals, but writing them down and seeing them and seeing the progress has really motivated me to keep going and keep adding goals and stuff. The really big things that really stress me out are tests and exams, but I learned with the time management, that I need to start a week ahead. Like, you gave us this sheet and it was about the studying ... you take your notes
in class and after class you need to review it and before you go to class, and if you can teach it to somebody, then you know what you’re doing.

Bethany’s example shows that she plans things out and focuses on planning accordingly to be prepared for future exams. Other participants used their planners and focused on immediate projects first such as homework and quizzes to accomplish short term goals. Both examples are showing how proper use of time management made a positive impact on their first semester experience.

A key area of similarities among historically underserved students relating to time management is the ability to also balance work responsibilities. Over half of the participants were work-study students or held other jobs for monetary compensation to support their academic pursuits. Working affected academic and social engagement and time management also played a huge role in this experience. Marisol and Bethany expressed the challenges with having a job to earn money while trying to balance their time on and off campus. Marisol does not put herself in social situations where she has to spend money because it creates an undue burden on her having a fun college experience and Bethany’s account is representative of other participants. She expressed between work and academics, she had very little room for social engagement:

I don’t know. Work and academics, if you do a pie chart of my daily life, my social part is very, very slim and so my academic and my work are the main parts, so unlike other people, like “I like to socialize or go to an event or party.” I’m not going to do that every weekend. I’m not going to do that every night. A lot of people do during college. More people are just focused on having fun, like this is college, you hear all these stories, but I’m more focused on preparing a better life for me and getting the grades and being the
influence for my family, and having that background. I’m more focused on school, so I get my homework done.

Being able to be very disciplined is difficult for her and others who also expressed the same sentiments but their focus is to better themselves and better their familial outcomes. Coincidentally, both effective time management and ineffective time management impacted participants’ social engagement during the first semester in college. The following section describes some of the participants’ accounts of engaging socially after receiving tips on how to balance academic and social aspects of college life upon completion of a summer bridge program.

**Social Engagement**

A good balance between academic and social engagement impacts on a student’s experience while enrolled in college. All participants were challenged to find a good balance between their academic and social walks of life and half of them believed they effectively utilized their planners to manage their time during the semester. Marisol and Bethany believed they managed their time well. Although Marisol stated that she was challenged to manage all aspects of her semester, she found it to be an enjoyable experience and felt she fared reasonably well:

The cons would be time management, whether you should go hang out with your friends, or finish one more paper that’s due Friday on that Monday. Or go to a cookout at 1:00 a.m. We were all juggling balloons, and it was actually pretty hard. And every time I felt like I couldn’t manage time correctly, and I couldn’t manage my emotions correctly, I
always thought about that session at [the bridge program], and I realized that it’s actually fun to manage all of these things. So, make it fun.

Here, Marisol reflected on a balloon exercise that she participated in during the bridge program and it gave her the encouragement to understand that although she is uncomfortable making tough decisions, it can be fun. In the previous section, an example was provided that described how Bethany and other similarly situated participants used their planners and they were on top of things academically, however, she and others failed to plan personal and social time. Bethany reflects on using lessons learned during the bridge program during the first few weeks of the semester:

Even with the time management class, even though I don’t procrastinate academically, trying to balance the two, like I said earlier, socially and academically, [reflecting on the program] have really helped me do that, too.

Here they both refer to applying lessons learned during the bridge program to help them create a balance between academic and social life. Marisol takes on balancing out the two as “fun” and Bethany discusses below how she could still improve her ability to manage her time wisely to incorporate more personal and social time:

I don’t know. I was really into school. I still am, but honestly, I wouldn’t even go and hang out with family or go see my boyfriend or even talking to friends around campus. I was just like, “No. I got to do this. I got to do this. I got to do this.” And so, I’ve seen myself slowly stop stressing about that. Everything’s going to be fine, as long as I’m trying my hardest. Because in the beginning doing that, I was lonely, because I wasn’t having those social interactions. So, seeing that transformation of me slowly starting to
ease up, focusing on school obviously, but making time for myself, because if I’m not improving myself or having those social or family relationships like I did, that is going to affect me academically obviously, so I’ve had that big change, really big.

Bethany acknowledges that she needs to create a better balance. She was really hard on herself to stay on top of her academics and created a lot of pressure on herself to the point where she began to stress out. She began to isolate herself from family and friends and became very lonely. As she reflected on the program and ways to improve her experience she began to forgive herself and allow time to plan in personal and social experiences, thus, providing her with a more pleasurable well-rounded experience. Similar to Bethany, Coach said his “first semester experience was good and bad,” recognizing the good part was his social engagement, however, he felt as if he could have done better on the academic side of the balance:

My first semester experience was good and bad. I’d say the good part is I met a lot of people, a lot of new people. I got involved a lot, joined a fraternity, T2U, LEAD, St. Jude’s, got involved a lot. Did a little bit of volunteering…and then the bad part was I didn’t feel like I did enough studying for my classes ’cause when I got my GPA results at the end, I wasn’t satisfied I was like, “Oh my gosh.” I knew I struggled a lot…I didn’t fail my classes, but I didn’t get what I wanted in them.

Here Coach didn’t realize that his over-involvement in the social aspects would have an adverse effect on the academics until the end of the semester. Coach did not effectively use his planner to balance out academic, social, and personal commitments. In contrast to Coach, Hannah barely spoke about her social commitments during her interview and when the researcher asked her a direct question about her social decisions she responded, “I did apply to some clubs and stuff.
That never really worked out, just because I never really emailed or anything.” Hannah acknowledges that she does procrastinate and her procrastination and inability to effectively manage her schedule to follow through on commitments could have resulted in her not getting involved in social clubs and organizations due to a hyper-focus on academic involvement.

Conclusion

The second superordinate theme, engaging academically and socially, requires a fine balance and not all participants completely understood what that balance meant for them early in their academic career. They did, however, understand how to achieve grades that were good enough to maintain good academic standing and some expressed that they wanted to do better next semester. One participant earned a 4.0 GPA. In this theme, about half of the participants utilized a planner to keep track of their schedule. Those participants who did manage their time by writing things down and planning ahead felt more confident in their academic coursework. They also felt more prepared for exams and, in class discussions, wanted more social engagement. Students who stated that they worked on the next assignment due and focused on short term goals, or procrastinated, seemed to be more stressed and overwhelmed by a lack of balance between academic, social, and work obligations if applicable. Over the first term, participants had to maintain their schedules, keep up with coursework, foster friendships and fulfill work obligations. It took a lot to stay motivated in this new environment. In the following section, sources of motivation and support for these students during their first semester in college are discussed.

Identifying Sources of Motivation and Support

Positive motivation and support systems are paramount for establishing a positive climate for student success. Helping historically underserved students identify ways to persist through
adversity is important to first semester transition and, eventually, for degree attainment. The third and final superordinate theme that emerged in the research study related participants’ first semester experiences with identifying sources of motivation and support. Motivation in this case referred to how students remained encouraged and kept moving forward when faced with challenges and obstacles throughout the semester. During the summer bridge program, students were encouraged to identify existing support circles and expanded their support circle through campus networking and a mentor program. When faced with trials during the semester, students were coached to think about their values, vision, and goals to keep pushing them forward. They were also encouraged to identify support on and off campus. A key slogan utilized was “you are not alone.” This was used to help student participants understand that you may come from a historically underserved group, however, all students enrolled are going through the same challenges and there are individuals around who can support you throughout the semester.

The researcher found three areas that resonated with all participants’ identification of motivation and support. First, participants expressed how they were motivated by their own desire to graduate and get a job to provide themselves and their future family with a better way of life. Participants also turned to family and friends for words of encouragement and support when they needed an extra push of inspiration. Campus resources in the form of faculty and staff were also helpful in supporting participants providing them with the tools they needed on campus to steer them in the right direction. Thus, it is important to discuss the three main areas where participants found motivation in the subthemes: intrinsic motivation, friends and family, and faculty and staff.

**Intrinsic Motivation**
Intrinsic motivation is an internal factor that inspires and drives one forward to accomplish set goals. All participants were intrinsically motivated to complete the semester in good standing and eventually graduate college and earn degrees in order to provide their future families with a better life than they had. When Tucker faced difficulties, he reflected on his purpose for attending college stating, “I’m here for a reason, and that I need to stay motivated and do what I came here to do, which was get a good education.” He also discussed the need to make good grades and the challenges he faced with pushing himself when he doesn’t do well:

For me, it was I got to make that good grade, and I don’t really know where that kind of comes from, it’s just that it feels so bad if I make below a B. I mean, and I know that’s kind of like a hard thing to live up to, but I guess it’s kind of like what motivates me to make good grades in my class is because I know that I need those good grades to benefit me in the future.

Tucker and other participants are extremely academically driven, and they associate good grades with high achievement. Although he sounds somewhat uncertain as far as where that drive comes from, it pushes him to excel and motivates him to be a successful college student.

Similar to Tucker, Coach also references his future goals as his motivation for success. During the bridge program students wrote short and long term goals and were encouraged to reflect on their goals during the semester when they began to lose the energy to push forward. In his account, Coach discussed graduation and not wanting to go back to his home environment was his motivation for success:

I stay motivated ’cause I know I wanna graduate, I know I wanna get that job, and be in my career, ’cause that’s all I’ve been talking about, that’s what keeps me motivated than
any goal, like I wanna get there, as this is where I wanna be. And I go out in the uptown sometimes just walking around, and I see some homeless people, I was like, “I don’t wanna be like that,” and when I go back home I’m like, “I don’t wanna live here for the rest of my life at home,” and that’s my motivation, not wanna stay home, don’t wanna be homeless, wanna be at the top. I wanna get there, enjoy my career, have my own house, and my own family one day. If I keep pushing, I will get there.

Coach speaks passionately about his goal of being “at the top.” This correlates with his desires and is similar to other first-generation participants’ accounts of attaining the highest goal achievement and best grades. This can put a lot of pressure on these students yet their desire to overcome obstacles overpowers all negativity. Coach knows that if he works hard, he will not have to go back home and will be able to create the life that he wants for himself.

Bethany also is determined to not be a product of her environment and is motivated by her own desire for success. This explains how many of the other research participants felt about their college experience. In their accounts, most participants expressed that they have achieved everything they have on their own. They have worked hard and that pushes them forward to succeed. They are not going to give up and getting accepted into college is just the beginning of their lifelong journey for success:

Everything I have, I worked for it myself, applying for college, scholarships, even paying for college now, I did it all through hard work and that was affected through how I grew up with my low income, and so I feel like if I didn’t grow up like that, maybe I would still be the same, but that’s a big pressure and motivational point for me to succeed, so I really identify with that.
Getting accepted into college is difficult and it is even more challenging for historically underserved students who may not have access to pre-college support resources such as college prep admission counselors in their high school, support on filling out FAFSA, finances to go on college tours, and other cultural and social capital that makes the college-going process less difficult. Like other participants, she also assumes the financial burden of supporting herself in college, which creates more pressure on her daily life. This statement explains how, even facing adversity as a low-income student, she feels pressure, but that pressure is the motivation that fuels her success. In addition to their own personal drive for success, participants stated how family and friends’ encouraging words motivated them throughout the semester.

Friends and Family

All participants turned to family and friends for personal matters of support before they turned to faculty, staff, and other forms of campus support. They also made very close relationships with other summer bridge program participants and became each other’s support system in times of need during the semester. Their first college friendships began in the program and more than half agree that if it wasn’t for the program, they would not have formed strong bonds and don’t know what they would have done or how they would have made good friends once everyone came to campus. Some of these bonds became extremely close and they consider each other best friends. Peter’s account represents most of the participant’s experiences as it relates to friends and family support:

I think mainly for me, personally, my friends and my parents and their words of encouragement is what make it easier in general for me. So, with challenges, I like to
know that they have my back, even if I do happen to fail. Yes, mainly their support and their love for me, I guess, is what helps me overcome challenges.

Words of encouragement and support to move forward drives these students towards the finish line. During the program, students were told to identify their sources of support at home so that in times of need they knew immediately who would be there to support them and who would be a distraction. During the semester, Peter acknowledges that his family and friend support circle was impactful and helped him overcome challenges that he faced during the semester.

Bethany also turned to family and friend support before faculty and staff. For her, it was important to be able to talk freely about her thoughts and feelings without pressure from people who she felt would judge her. Having open honest communication with those she knew and trusted was most important for her and other participants as well. When asked who she turned to for support when faced with challenges, Bethany said:

So, I mainly turn to my boyfriend and my family for support. I did turn to advisors and professors, but only to an extent, like I didn’t break down in front of them, but I did tell them my challenges. So, with family and him, I could really break down in front of them and they understood, but it was mostly towards ... I really broke down more in front of my boyfriend, because I feel like I have this status to uphold. My family brags about me all the time, the Dean’s list and my GPA and all of that, and I just feel like I can’t really break down in front of them, because I don’t want to be perceived as weak.

Bethany shares her challenges with appearing weak in front of her family and how she cannot open up to them as much as she would like. As a first-generation, low-income student, this is difficult because she wants to bring her family on the journey of college with her, however, if
they believe it is too difficult, those that she wants to pave the way for may decide that it is too hard and it may be easier to stay in poverty or the local community versus working hard and going to a four-year college. The weight of her family rests on her shoulders and like other first-generation students, everyone in her family is looking up to her as their role model and the example that their family can achieve success. In times like these, she also looks at her vision board that she made during the program:

And I would always look at my vision board, because I hang it above my desk, and I have pictures of my family on there, especially my younger cousins and siblings and that always motivated me and helped me regroup myself, like, “You’re here for a reason. You’re being this role model for them and this is for your future.”

So not only do words of inspiration from her family inspire her but reflecting on her family also inspires and motivates her to succeed. Marisol also has a very supportive family and as a first-generation minority college student she too spoke with family when times were difficult. Over winter break, she opened up with family and friends about her experiences and they were able to emotionally support her. From these conversations, Marisol realized that in spite of her challenges, she did well:

I remember over winter break I told all of my family about my first semester, and I realized that the more you communicate with people about something, the more you accept it. Because there were a lot of things that happened in my first semester that I could not accept, you know, my ethnicity, financial-wise, being a minority, being considered unprivileged. But talking about how I went through a first semester at a university was impressive. You know? And talking about how I’m doing good my second semester is even better.
By speaking with her family, she was accepting that she did a great job her first semester in college. She realized that although she comes to college “underprivileged” she surprised herself on how well she did and how well she adjusted because she “impressed” herself. It took going home to speak with others who see her true value to tell her how well she did. Often, students work through the semester without any confirmation they are doing well beyond exam grades. No one says college is tough, and even tougher for underserved students but being here is an accomplishment and not dropping out by the end of the first semester is also a feat. Hearing positive words of affirmation from her family gave her the confidence and motivation to come back in the second semester recharged to do even better.

**Faculty and Staff**

Although participants turned to family and friends for social emotional support, they turned to faculty and staff for academic motivation and support. All of the participants shared similar accounts by mentioning how the institution was a very supportive and understanding group of faculty and staff. While attending workshops during the bridge program, students were strongly encouraged to attend office hours, maintain connections with faculty mentors, and utilize campus support staff resources such as academic advising, tutoring, and maintaining meetings as needed with the student success coordinator during the semester. Hannah discussed the difference between teachers in high school and professors in college, which most participants can relate to:

Meeting the professors was great. Coming up in high school, all the teachers would be like, “Your professor is not going to stand for this. They’re not going to be your friend.” All the professors here, they’re great. And they support you, and they understand you. They’ll be like, “Oh, hey.” And they’ll talk to me outside of class. So that was awesome.
The bridge program incorporated faculty mentors so that students could begin to form a relationship with a faculty member outside of the classroom and to begin having a one-on-one relationship with a professor early in their college experience. This intentional process was incorporated into the program to break down the faculty-student stereotype that faculty members are unapproachable and are the gatekeepers of all knowledge, which is generally associated with fears among first-generation students. Teambuilding activities were designed to have students and faculty work together in social settings and begin bonding early and often. During the semester, faculty mentors from the summer program were encouraged to continue to meet with the students and some students and faculty mentors maintained close relationships.

From these interactions, participants were more comfortable approaching their professors, asking to meet during office hours to form connections with them similar to their relationship with their faculty mentors from the program. The participants were comfortable and confident in their approach. In half of the instances, participants formed really strong relationships with faculty similar to Tucker’s experience:

I guess with the faculty, it was just I feel like with the faculty, it was just knowing that they’re not just here to teach classes, like they also care about you. That’s what I like about the [institution’s] environment, is that it’s so small that you’re able to build those relationships with faculty and that they would be there if I needed anyone to talk to.

Open and honest communication with faculty coupled with the small campus size made participants feel as if campus was a home away from home. Some participants became very close with their professors during family hardships as well and were provided with accommodations for their academic needs. Having this support from faculty was encouraging and helped
participants push through during difficult times during the semester knowing that their professor cared about them and wanted them to succeed.

When Coach had a problem in his classes he reached out to his professor. In doing so, he was able to gain more academic understanding and was inspired to do better in his class:

If I have a problem, I usually ask my professor if they can help. If it’s not clear to me, I try to go a tutoring or ask other students who understand it. I wanna know what I’m learning because before when I was in high school, I was just, “Let’s do the work, turn it in.” “Here’s your grade.” And now I’m like, “I actually need to know this ’cause I know some point in my career I’m gonna have to remember this and the sooner I know it now, it will be better for me when I get the job.”

Again, having close connections with professors can motivate and encourage students in their classes when they feel as if they are not doing their best, leading to supportive academic achievement. Since most of the participants are academic and career driven, like Coach, these relationships foster and build interpersonal confidence and support in subject matter for historically underrepresented students.

Conclusion

The third superordinate theme, identifying sources of motivation and support, identifies ways in which historically underserved student participants in a summer bridge program made sense of how they were motivated during their first semester. As students discussed how they faced challenges during the semester, subthemes emerged identifying how they are primarily intrinsically motivated and they turned to people who were internal and external to the institution for motivation and support. Due to their underrepresented backgrounds all of the participants are
motivated by future goals and aspirations. They want to earn the best grades, so that they can get the best internships that will lead to them getting the best jobs. Participants do not want to return to their hometowns and live lives similar to their upbringing. They all came to college for the purpose of “getting out” and doing better. A few of them mentioned in their accounts that there was not any other post-high school options for them other than college. During adverse times, participants would reflect on their vision boards that displayed their values, strengths, and goals towards graduation as a constant motivation to persist.

They also want their families to be proud of them in the process. Although family is a source of motivation, it is also a stressor for some because there is pressure to be the example. They believe if they fail then their family also fail and younger siblings and cousins coming behind them may lose interest in the “college dream.” Having great faculty and staff in a supportive environment motivates the students for success. Their professors believe in them and encourage them to do well. When they are challenged inside and outside of the classroom, faculty and staff also listen to their problems and help them come up with solutions. Participants found this comforting because it helped them feel at home on the campus because the professors not only cared about academic success but about personal success as well.

**Conclusion**

This study explored how historically underserved students made meaning of their participation in a pre-college summer bridge program while enrolled in their first semester at a private, PWI liberal arts institution. All participants took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews about their reflections on their first semester in college. The analysis of the interview data yielded three superordinate themes and seven subordinate themes that identified how participation in the program impacted on their first semester experiences. The superordinate
themes gathered represent expressions from all participants’ accounts. The subordinate themes were acknowledged if the theme reoccurred in at least half of the research participants’ accounts. Each participant’s account offered nuanced perspectives, however, all participants expressed similar comments for the superordinate themes. By applying tips learned during the summer bridge program throughout the semester, data reveal that participating in the program played a significant role in supporting first semester success and retention for participants.

In order to interpret what participating in a summer bridge program meant to participants, it was important to understand why they chose to apply to the program and how they felt during the transition week from high school to college. All six participants described the college application process as stressful yet rewarding and when they were sent a personal invitation to apply to the summer bridge program they were motivated to participate in order to get a jump start on learning the ins and outs of college. Attending the program helped them gain confidence that they applied throughout the semester in both academic and social settings. Students also felt more comfortable identifying campus resources and building relationships with professors upon course enrollment due to their interactions with faculty mentors and other campus support staff during the week of the bridge program. The development of establishing and maintaining lasting friendships that also supported and impacted motivational influences in each other’s lives was also important to their experiences. At the conclusion of the program, participants referred to each other as being “family members.” Due to participation in the program students also were more aware of diversity on campus and were empowered to be representatives of their “group” as a historically underserved student at a PWI.

Participants stated that there is a fine line to balance and manage time between academic, social, and work obligations. This is still a challenge for a majority of participants and some said
that they underutilized their planners and did not practice good time management techniques despite learning how to effectively manage time during the program. Participants who focused more on academic work left very little time for social experiences, and those who became overly involved in clubs, organizations, extracurricular activities, and work did not leave enough time for academic work or themselves. It was difficult to maintain their schedules, keep up with coursework, foster friendships, and fulfill work obligations. It took a lot to stay motivated in this new environment when poor management of time engrossed their experience. Although many participants were challenged with time management, those who did manage their time by writing things down and planning ahead felt more confident in their academic coursework.

Participants were motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Future goals and aspirations and obtaining a degree motivated students to persist. Students also reflected on their vision boards and revisited their values during the semester and this demonstrates the impact that the bridge program had on their first semester encounters. Friendships developed during the bridge transition week were lasting and participants motivated and encouraged each other by reflecting on workshops that guided them through first semester challenges. Other sources of motivation came from family, friends, faculty, and staff. During the program, students were encouraged to identify sources of support and during the semester students turned to their support systems in their internal and external environments. When students were challenged outside of the classroom environment they turned to family and friends and with academic challenges they turned to faculty and staff. Due to the small close knit campus environment, participants also felt comfortable being open with and turning to faculty in order to receive motivation. They found this comforting because it inspired academic and personal success.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-generation, low-income, and racial and ethnic minority students made meaning of their first semester experience at a PWI after participating in a pre-college summer bridge program designed to support historically underserved students’ high school to college transition. The constructivist-interpretivist qualitative research approach, specifically IPA research methodology, was employed to best capture the meaning of the participants’ semester giving voice to their experiences. The approach of IPA was suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to focus on participant perceptions and interpret their experiences by making sense of their described interactions and occurrences (Smith et al., 2009). In doing so it articulates actual meaningful accounts based on their involvement and understanding of their life while experiencing said phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009; Ponterotto, 2005).

This research study was aimed at addressing a critical gap in the knowledge base as it relates to historically underserved student experiences and how the essence of their involvement in the summer bridge program impacted their self-efficacy during their first semester in college. In addition to exploring their individual experiences, this research study also aimed to explore group experiences and the collective efficacy of the cohort as they interacted during their first semester. Motivated by Bandura’s (2001) agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (SCT) which builds upon Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT), the agentic perspective differentiates three modes of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective. Each mode of agency is rooted in a person’s ability to believe in one’s own actions to make things happen and to effect change, which is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Ng & Luciannetti, 2015). Hence, utilizing an IPA approach in conjunction with the theoretical framework in order to
understand how individual actions would affect first semester experiences was suitable for this research study.

The study answered the following research question: How do historically underserved students make meaning of their participation in a pre-college summer bridge program while enrolled in their first semester at a private PWI liberal arts institution? Six participants who applied and were selected to attend the summer bridge program were recruited through purposeful homogeneous sampling for this study to take part in semi-structured interviews about their first semester experiences. All participants identified as either first-generation, minority, or Pell Grant eligible students. Analysis of the interview data yielded three superordinate themes, which were identified if the theme reoccurred in at least half of the research participants’ accounts. All six participants made statements relating to each superordinate theme. The superordinate themes were: 1) developing collegiate confidence; 2) engaging academically and socially; and 3) identifying sources of motivation and support. In the final chapter, the researcher reflects on each of the three superordinate themes in the context of existing literature discussing whether the findings clarify or problematize previous studies. The findings are also considered in relationship to the theoretical framework. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

**Developing Collegiate Confidence**

Research supports the need to improve collegiate academic and social preparation, transition, and success among high school graduates, and particularly for underrepresented groups, in an effort to support retention and graduation rates (Moore & Shulock 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Slade et al. (2015) have recognized these challenges and noted that summer bridge programs are used as tools to address college readiness. The participants in
this study were asked to speak about their experiences attending a summer bridge program and reflect on how participating in a high school to college transition program impacted on their first semester experiences. The responses garnered were the basis for the first superordinate theme: developing collegiate confidence.

As participants reflected on their participation in the summer bridge program and the impact it had on their first semester experiences, all acknowledged, in some capacity, that attending the program helped them gain collegiate confidence. Elements from this theme resulted in the determination of the subordinate theme: bridge program as the foundation of support and success. Results indicate that students felt more comfortable on campus, were able to identify campus resources, and expressed improved college readiness and study success skills since graduating high school. Participants communicated that they “knew what to expect” prior to their first week of classes due to their interfaces with programs and services provided during the transition week. The research literature supports these findings. Suzuki et al. (2012) have noted that first-year students are more successful when they feel connected to the campus community. Thayer (2000) has stated that summer bridge program participants develop enhanced confidence, a stronger sense of belonging, and increased comfort with the campus environment along with higher order collegiate expectations, thus, leading to higher retention rates compared to their peers. In the present study, participants reflected confidently on their ability to navigate campus, perform well academically, and felt like campus was “home.”

In addition to offering academic skill development, bridge programs have been proven to be most effective on the impact made for underrepresented students in focusing on soft as well as social skill development, which aids in transitional and collegiate success (Zhang & Smith, 2011). Findings from this study align with the research literature. In addition to developing
college readiness and study success skills, participants stated that the bridge program also helped them establish relationships with faculty, friends, and mentors, gain a sense of belonging, and acclimate to college life early on, which had an impact on their first semester experiences leading to increased self-efficacy. Cultivating faculty mentor relationships during the program and using networking techniques during the semester to develop relationships with their professors was a strong influencer. Participants were surprised that faculty were so relatable, and they were more comfortable getting to know their professors after attending the program, based on interactions with faculty mentors. This finding is consistent with research that has determined that early relationships with faculty are vital streams of support for first-year students (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).

Early relationships with friends was also important for first semester transition, success, and efficacy development through positive social interactions. Friedlander et al. (2007) have also discussed the impact that social support systems have on at-risk students by noting that successful transition programs provide students with opportunities to build community with likeminded peers who can support each other through new academic and social challenges they may encounter while enrolled. The author has further stated these relationships are “vital” to their success. Current research participants referred to fellow bridge participants as their “family” and they relied on each other during difficult times during the semesters. Over the course of the semester, participants found themselves remaining in contact with their bridge peers. Participants discussed studying together, eating lunch together, and joining social organizations together. Although they made other friends over the course of the semester, they always felt a sense of connection and understanding when they interacted with fellow bridge
participants. This sheds light on collective efficacy and group support dynamics for achieving a common goal (Bandura, 2001).

Academic and social workshops were a key premise in supporting student confidence. Participants referred to these programs as being helpful to them during their first semester in their accounts. During their semester, students applied concepts in both academic and social settings that helped them better prepare for tests or network with individuals around campus to increase their social capital. This finding aligns with Maggio et al., (2005). Their research results on first-time, first-year, at-risk students in a summer transition program have indicated that academic and social programs supported students and helped them become better acquainted with resources. This, in turn, helped the students build a connection to the institution. This finding aligns with the engagement of proxy agency by working with other individuals to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001).

From these strong diverse social interactions and sharing of stories with peers, faculty mentors, and staff from various walks of life, participants were empowered by their own uniqueness and became more aware of how their diverse perspective adds value to the university setting. It also empowered them as historically underserved students thus adding meaning to how they developed collegiate confidence leading to the subordinate theme: diversity awareness and empowerment. All except one participant expressed how they were more aware of the diverse environment of higher education, as well as their own personal sense of diversity. This sense of newfound awareness in the collegiate environment led to a display of empowerment and vocal concern for themselves and others from similarly situated backgrounds during their first semester. Several participants specifically expressed self-awareness, diversity awareness, empowerment, and one individual spoke directly on being a first-generation, low-income
advocate in her classes. Being aware of diverse perspectives in higher education coupled with a sense of empowerment can be a great foundation for a sense of belonging and success for many underserved students at a PWI.

Past research has viewed student empowerment through various lenses, such as factors that support minority student retention through involvement in support organizations, utilizing identity-conscious methods to support student success, and analyzing the role of self-empowerment on retention (Simmons, 2013; Pendakur, 2016; Maldonado, Zapata, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005). Simmons (2013) has conducted a qualitative study involving two African American male participants with the intention of understanding how involvement in an empowerment student organization would impact on their persistence. Results indicated that participation empowered persistence, and themes identified in the research were college preparedness, high aspirations and goals, social connections and relationships, and growth through student organizational commitment. Themes found in Simmon’s study are similar to subordinate themes found in this research study. Conclusions can be drawn that programs designed to support historically underserved students can provide them with peer affinity groups and safe spaces that can impact self-awareness and empower them to be consciously aware of diversity in higher education. Research on the impact of summer bridge programs developing self-empowerment and diversity awareness is scare and more research needs to be conducted in this area in order to analyze if this finding is unique to this institution or if it is common among other historically underrepresented students in similarly situated positions. Further research in this area is very important.

In summary, the first finding reflects how first-generation, low-income, minority students at a private PWI experience their first semester after participating in a summer bridge program.
Participants developed confidence, academic success skills, social networking skills, diversity awareness, and were empowered through their involvement with the program. They were able to identify campus resources and made lasting friendships with peers and mentors. Similar to the experiences of African American students who attend HBCUs, participants developed positive social and psychological benefits from attending the program. Their involvement in a homogeneous pre-college environment with other historically underserved students allowed them to boost self-esteem, enhance confidence, establish psychological feelings of comfort and belonging, and develop a greater sense of empowerment (Allen, 1992). All of these characteristics led to the development of collegiate confidence, which had a profound impact on how they engaged academically and socially throughout their first semester.

**Engaging Academically and Socially**

Research supports the need to improve collegiate academic and social preparation among high school graduates and particularly those from underrepresented groups (Moore & Shulock, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Summer bridge programs are used as tools to address these challenges in supporting college readiness in an effort to support retention and graduation rates (Slade et al., 2015). Participants in this research study were provided with academic and social integration success tips while participating in the bridge program. During their interviews, a majority of participants stated that time spent during the semester was devoted to their interactions studying independently, attending tutoring, going to class, attending office hours, meeting with academic advisors, participating in group study sessions, joining student organizations, working, and building their social network. These responses garnered the basis for the second superordinate theme: engaging academically and socially.
Data collected from these interviews demonstrate the necessary concerted involvement to engage both academically and socially and that not all participants completely understand what that balance means for them early in their academic career. Participation in the program helped students realize that it takes a combination of both academic and social engagement to be successful. However, many were challenged in creating a balance between the two as a result of varying priorities and inefficient time management. Half of the participants used planners or mobile devices to keep track of upcoming assignments and social events by planning their schedules and meeting deadlines early. The other half of the participants utilized planning devices occasionally and often procrastinated on assignments. In both cases, participants communicated that although they perceived that they did well at the end of the semester, they felt as if they could have done a better job at managing their time and, thus, adding value to their ability to find balance between engaging academically and socially. Research supports these findings. In a study related to retention, which analyzed the experiences among African American students at PWIs, results indicated that African American students view higher academic achievement and greater academic engagement as being directly linked to being more intelligent and it supports their achievement goals leading towards graduation (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Similar to participants in this current study, students who were heavily academically focused did not allow much flexibility in their schedules to engage socially because they directly linked grades with success and social engagement was less of a priority.

Unlike some studies on academically at-risk minority student participants in summer bridge programs, many of the participants in this study were high-performing students and were successful academically prior to college enrollment. Duranczyk et al. (2004) have argued that summer bridge programs can assist minority students who are academically gifted by helping
them understand how to balance academic, social, and athletic related activities. These students often find themselves challenged during the first couple of semesters at college despite the fact that most research conducted on summer bridge programs have focused on students’ lack of pre-college preparedness. Similar to this current study, Duranczyk and associates have noticed that academic and social balance is important for success. These findings indicate that there is more work that can be done around supporting historically underserved student engagement from an academic and social balance perspective, in addition to academic preparation.

Based on accounts gathered from this study, academic preparation can be viewed as the amount of academic capital a student brings with them to college or that they enhance while enrolled in order to be successful in the classroom environment. Academic engagement is the level of involvement at which a student interacts with various non-social aspects of college life in order to be successful in the classroom environment. The most successful college students must not only be prepared in order to be academically engaged, he or she must possess the wherewithal to grapple with both in class and out of class experiences while matriculating towards graduation, thus building a more well-rounded engaged individual. Proper social engagement has been linked to holistic student development (Zander et al., 2013). A healthy balance between academic and social engagement can be rationalized through proper utilization of time management. Research participants spoke about their first semester experiences and time management. Despite trying to use their planners based on recommendations provided to them during the transition program, assignments, projects, and social involvement got the better of all participants, sometimes impacting on their grades or their ability to get involved on campus. Half of the participants became overly involved in academic work and they spoke candidly about not
having a social life. The other half of the participants said their over-involvement with trying to build their social network sometimes took their focus away from their academic work.

During these times, both sets of participants would regroup by utilizing resources around them to get back on track. Allen (1992) has referenced the impact that institutional climate, academic rigor, university resources, race relations, faculty and friend relationships, and social support networks can have on a student’s performance. Despite time management challenges, utilizing social support resources and trying to find homeostasis among academic and social engagement, all participants communicated that they were proud of their first semester accomplishments. Although participants were challenged with managing their time in order to find a healthy balance engaging academically and socially, they were able to stay motivated in this new environment and complete their first semester in good academic standing. In the following section sources of motivation and support for these students during their first semester in college are discussed.

**Identifying Sources of Motivation and Support**

Social cognitive theory’s key premise postulates that people act with purpose, driven by goals and are motivated by intrinsic beliefs of efficacy expectations and outcome expectations derived from social environmental contexts (Pajares, 1996). Participants in this research study developed vision boards, discussed values and established belief systems, and were encouraged to identify sources of support that could motivate them during their college enrollment. During their interviews participants were asked to reflect on their feelings during times of difficulty and were asked who they turned to when faced with adversity or challenges throughout the semester. These responses garnered the basis for the final superordinate theme: identifying sources of motivation and support.
Students were primarily, intrinsically motivated to succeed during their first semester in college. Motivation is a behavior that energizes and directs a person’s behavior towards achieving or reaching life goals or outcomes (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). All participants in this study come from underserved backgrounds. In their accounts, they all shared a common motivational factor, which was expressing their only means for building a better life for themselves in the future was to obtain a college degree. Research on first-year student success notes self-accountability combined with acknowledging and utilizing the appropriate resources at the right time are essential motivating factors towards retention among first-generation students (Strand, 2013). Although all participants in the study were not minority or first-generation students, the intersectionality of their underrepresented backgrounds shared common traits and beliefs with first-generation students. In a study on ethnic and gender differences in correlation to first-year efficacy and motivation, D’Lima and associates (2014) have found that all students, regardless of gender or ethnicity, are more likely to get higher first semester grades if they are highly, intrinsically and extrinsically motivated in relation to their goals. Results also indicated that there was no significant difference among intrinsic motivational factors when comparing Caucasian and African American students. Findings from the current study coincide with D’Lima et al.’s findings. By defining goals during the bridge program, all participants regardless of background, expressed how they were all intrinsically motivated during the semester and persisted in the first semester. In addition to intrinsic motivational factors, participants utilized resources around them in family, friends, faculty, and staff to extrinsically support and motivate them during difficult times.

Gandara and Contreras (2009) have expressed how first-generation students are concerned with not wanting to place additional burdens on their families because their family
members often do not have the social or cultural capital to understand the college-going process. However, Moore (2001) has noted that parental support among minority students enhances confidence, efficacy, and motivates students to be successful at PWIs. Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011) have also described the value families and friends have for motivation and support for minority students even when there are differences in socio-economic backgrounds. The support did not differ and all accounts in the current study provided similar sources of engagement and encouraging messages about the value and importance of education. Family and parental support is important to success and social systems such as friends and near peers impact on persistence (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Strand, 2013). In turn, family and friends often give back to students by motivating and encouraging them to do well when faced with obstacles despite not attending college themselves. Friends who are similarly situated and are near peers, such as college students, provide support through example and encouragement such as, “we can do this together.” Other previous research sources have noted that more first-generation students want to give back to their family and the community upon graduation in comparison to non-first-generation students (Banks-Santilli, 2015). In a sense, there is a mutual exchange between families and their college student attendees.

The participants in this current research want their families to be proud of them in their college-going process and they often take on the responsibility of bearing the weight of their family on their shoulders. This can be burdensome to some students. A parent who has high academic aspirations for their children can have a direct and indirect impact on the student’s self-efficacy (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Although family is a source of motivation, it was interesting to find out in this current study that family motivation could also be a stressor because there is pressure to be the example and if he or she fails then their family also fails. This
finding is in contrast to the majority of research on first-generation, minority, and low-income student success and familial involvement and the adverse impact on motivation is an area for future exploration.

Suzuki and colleagues (2012) have reported that student opinions of faculty changed after their involvement in a summer transition program. By incorporating faculty mentors in the bridge program, participants discovered that faculty members were “human” and it helped them feel at home on the campus early in their academic career because the professors not only cared about academic success but about personal success as well. In the current study, both faculty and staff support impacted the first semester success of participants through believing in them and supporting their retention efforts. They encouraged them to do well and genuinely cared about them beyond the classroom and academic settings. Guiffrida (2005) has shown how faculty members play an essential role in advocating and supporting African American students. Their interactions helped them find additional financial resources, locate campus resources, and advocated on their behalf to family members regarding academic and personal issues. Their level of involvement helped students navigate PWIs, reinforced feelings of a positive campus climate, and aided their academic success. When participants were challenged inside and outside of the classroom, faculty and staff listened to their problems and helped them come up with solutions, motivating them to continue to persist.

Revisiting the Theoretical Framework

Motivated by Bandura’s (2001) agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (SCT), three modes of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective are differentiated. Each mode is rooted in a person’s ability to believe in the power of their own actions to make things happen and to effect change, which is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015).
The nature of human agency is founded on the idea that people can exercise influence over what they do based on various interacting factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and self-regulated learning (Bandura, 1997). This framework was utilized to examine the meaning of participation for historically underserved students in a summer bridge program at a private PWI. The framework, which emphasizes the impact of human agency on first-generation, low-income, minority students, takes a psychosocial perspective on how these students develop self-efficacy through their experiences.

In many walks of life, individuals do not have direct control over social and institutional conditions or the environment that shapes and affects their everyday lives. So personal agency looks at intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and the self-reflectiveness of the individual’s intentions of being self-motivated and proactive about future events (Bandura, 2001). Participants in the current study expressed intrinsic motivational drivers for success as they reflected on personal influences and developmental success tips garnered from the bridge program, thus, aligning personal agency to their first semester experiences. Considering social environments, proxy agency is socially constructed, and individuals work with others who have social capital to act on their behalf to secure desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001). Participants interacted with faculty and peer mentors during the bridge program to develop social and networking skills. Suzuki et al. (2012) have noted that first-year students are more successful when they feel connected to the campus community and have peer social support. The participants in the current study applied networking skills during the semester to form and enhance social relationships with the intentions of building social capital.

In addition to building social capital through proxy agency, collective agency had an impact on participant experiences in this study. Although research on self-efficacy focuses on the
individual outcomes, people often work as social units and this collective work is insightful for
group functions (Lent, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2005). Booth and associates (2013) have observed
informal study groups, peer networks, other group connections providing comprehensive support
for student collegiate experiences. The program participants in this current study formed strong
bonds with each other prior to course enrollment and their interactions over the course of a seven
day transition program bonded them to the point where they referred to themselves as a “family”
at the conclusion of the program and maintained that relationship over the course of the semester.
They often ate lunch together, studied together, and supported one another through academic and
social aspects of college life. Thomas (2014) has postulated that students who work in groups,
develop close friendships, and are collectively encouraged often have better GPAs. This finding
has led researchers to determine that peer group influence directly impacts on academic
performance.

Overall, this study supported Bandura’s (2001) agentic perspective of SCT. Its approach
aids in the understanding of historically underserved student participation in a summer bridge
program and the impact that it has on their first semester experiences. By applying the model to
analyze first-generation, low-income, minority student experiences this study provided examples
of how the individual, social environments, and collective group interactions are significant for
the development of self-efficacy and first semester success that can be used to inform practice
and future research.

**Conclusion**

The research question guiding this study was, “How do historically underserved students
make meaning of their participation in a pre-college summer bridge program while enrolled in
their first semester at a private PWI liberal arts institution?” The answer to this question was
found by listening to the way these students made meaning of traversing their first semester. Various environmental factors supported and challenged their self-efficacy in the social and academic context of the collegiate environment and their stories illuminated interpersonal resilience, persistence, and motivational factors they endured as first-generation, low-income, and minority students.

Each of the three findings were supported by the research literature and analysis of the data affirmed the importance of summer bridge programs on historically underserved student success and its impact on self-efficacy. The bridge program provided participants with an early start to connecting to the campus climate, resources, and facilities which helped ease their doubts and support their tenacity for success. Participants in the program were able to reflect on programs, workshops, and services rendered during the transitional week and successfully applied tools during the semester. In each account, and consistent with past literature, summer transitional programs are highly impactful on student success and retention initiatives. Attendees were assisted in adjusting to the campus climate, building community with faculty and peers, and enhancing diversity awareness. Participants were also empowered by their participation in the homogeneous environment and became institutional advocates for historically underserved student success and spoke out about their life experiences in classroom discussions and casually with peers. However, there are few research studies on the impact of summer bridge program participation on historically underserved student empowerment.

Data collected from the current interviews and confirmed through previous studies, demonstrates that it takes a concerted effort to develop collegiate confidence. Participation in the program helped students realize that it takes a combination of both academic and social engagement to be successful. Time management is extremely important to college student
success and not all participants completely understand what that balance means for them early in their academic career. However, many were challenged to create that balance resulting in varying levels of academic and social engagement and inept prioritization of time management. Research supports intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors noting they are essential to student success however, in some cases families can create undue pressure resulting in negative associations towards success.

In conclusion, from the framework of the agentic perspective of SCT, participant experiences in the bridge program had an impact on the development of self-efficacy. The application of concepts derived from attending a pre-college summer bridge program helped first-generation, low-income and minority students develop collegiate confidence, engage academically and socially, and identify sources of motivation and support. Similar to traits of collective agency, higher educational institutions are social systems comprised of many interconnected networks of faculty, staff, students, and administrators sharing a common belief geared towards student success. The aforementioned findings suggest opportunities for stakeholders in supporting historically underserved students during their first semester in college through the participation in summer bridge programs.

Implications for Practice

The nature of higher education is evolving and the number of historically underserved student populations arriving at college campuses is increasing. Higher education professionals need to take note of the unique qualities these students bring with them to campus and understand how to support these students from enrollment to graduation. The following are several suggestions generated for administrators and practitioners based on the findings from this study. They are intended to enhance the first semester experience for first-generation, low-
income, minority students, in general, and provide additional information on how summer bridge programs are paramount in institutional success initiatives. Specific actions that the researcher is committed to undertake in her role as a higher education administrator and scholar-practitioner are also included.

The first recommendation is for institutions to develop and implement high school to college transition programs designed to support historically underserved student populations. Many institutions design programs to aid developmental and remedial education for historically at-risk student populations. The current study findings indicate that all historically underserved populations of students, regardless of high school rank, class standing, or end of term GPA can benefit from attending a summer bridge program. Attendance allows students to develop a sense of belonging, boosts academic and social confidence, and equips participants with early relationships with faculty, staff, and peers that are impactful for their first semester success. Sharing this research with local institutions that do not currently have a high school to college transition program and consulting them on best practices for programmatic development and implementation on designing summer bridge programs for historically underserved student populations would be beneficial.

The second recommendation is to ensure students are able to identify early social support systems on and off campus. Positive sources of motivation and support is paramount for persistence among underrepresented students. Participants stated that social support motivated them throughout the semester, however, there was a slight negative impact and pressure for some participants. In the process of identifying sources of support it is important to educate families on the first-year student experience. This is extremely important for first-generation families as well as low-income families that may need additional information on how to support their student’s
mental, academic, social, and financial wellbeing while they are enrolled. This can help those who may not have the social and cultural capital of the collegiate environment to understand high impact times such as mid-term and finals week. This could also increase the communication stream between families and campuses as they work together more to bridge student support. Working with the Student Life Office and aligning communication to the families of historically underserved students in order to assess their needs involvement with institutional programs designed for families such as Parents and Families Weekend is ideal. Forming relationships with family members prior to the summer bridge program and maintaining that relationship during the semester is also important.

The third recommendation is to work with the institution on providing continual support during the academic year for summer bridge program participants. Students are provided with great pre-college tools and success skills. However, at the research site, they are left unattended during the semester with the exception of a mid-semester check in with the summer bridge program coordinator. Research results indicate the need for follow-up workshops on time management and revisiting the importance of balancing social and academic demands. The researcher is committed to working with The Center for Student Success and the Peer Mentor Program designed to support first-generation minority students. Forming collaborations with established offices and programs can lead to better semester support for participants without the need for soliciting additional funding to develop new programs.

The last recommendation is to educate and train faculty on the experiences of historically underserved student populations. Faculty involvement is essential to student success. Student participants in the program who developed early and impactful experiences with faculty mentors during the program were able to build relationships with professors outside of the program. They
engaged with professors, attended office hours, were more involved in classroom discussions, and formed strong bonds with their professors beyond a professor pupil academic relationship. Participants felt as if their professors genuinely cared about them as an individual beyond the academic setting and helped students process through various personal challenges. Positive faculty student relationships have been linked to greater persistence and retention rates for historically underserved students. Faculty training on how to interact with and understand the experiences of first-generation, low-income, minority students is likely to strengthen an inclusive campus climate and benefit student success. From a personal perspective, it is important to have conversations with the Associate Dean for Student Success and develop a training plan on means of incorporating training with existing workshops, providing resources on the experiences of our students, and best practices for working with historically underserved student populations.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several aspects of the student experience post participation in a summer bridge program that this study was unable to adequately address. The first recommendation is to take a closer examination of the impact of human agency on first semester experiences among bridge program participants. Understanding how personal, proxy, and collective agency is developed during program participation and subsequently how it is utilized during the semester can be a valuable addition to scholarly research in higher education on historically underrepresented student groups. Results from this study indicate that the interaction between these forms of agency played a role for the individual interacting in the environment, thus, impacting on outcome behaviors. Specifically, taking a closer look at the four areas of personal agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, how students grapple with
these areas, and how they impact on self-efficacy and persistence during the first semester for first-generation, low-income, and minority students is valuable.

The second recommendation involves analyzing family involvement with respect to motivation and support. Several student accounts in this research study portrayed findings that were in contrast to the majority of research on first-generation, minority, and low-income student success. While a majority of responses spoke positively about family involvement and interaction, some experiences garnered an adverse impact on motivation. A few participants identified their family as being a source of stress that may negatively impact motivation and first semester experiences. While all participants in this study conveyed that their family, overall, had a positive impact on their success and motivates them to succeed, it is important to gather larger sample sizes, conduct case studies, and gather more data from other institution types to determine if family encouragement could cause more undue pressure on the underserved student experience. Because some first-generation, low-income, or minority students drop out of college early in order to go back home and support family members during times of crisis, further investigation of this finding would be worthwhile.

The third recommendation is to analyze high-achieving historically underserved students and their experiences in engaging academically and socially as it relates to time management from the angle of personal agency of forethought. Forethought allows people to plan ahead, prioritize, and provide direction as a person work towards anticipated outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Students have to plan ahead in order to manage their time between class, tutoring, independent study, office hours, on campus involvement, and work. Further research on how students think about planning their schedules could impact on the way student success advocates support students in enhancing time management skills. In addition to time management, the financial
impact of time prioritization is critical for future research in higher education among bridge program participants. High-achieving students are known for over commitment and involvement on college campuses, however, many historically underserved students have on campus work study, off campus jobs, and additional financial pressures to cover college tuition while sometimes being obligated to continue to support family back home as well. The additional financial factors can make it difficult for high-achieving students to set themselves up for success especially during the first semester of college. It would also be important to assess quantitative areas of success and triangulate data around campus usage of resources and time management to help students continue to find balance beyond the transition program.

The final recommendation is to further examine the individual characteristics of the historically underserved categories while also recognizing intersectionality, gender, and racial differences. This research study represented the accounts for first-generation, low-income, or minority students and their first semester experiences after participation in a summer bridge program. While many students in this study made meaning in similar ways, it is worth exploring the uniqueness of the racial differences and gender differences of historically underserved student populations and their accounts. This could add insight into how to best support individual differences among participants by creating differentiated experiences while continuing to offer programmatic workshops for historically underserved student participants in a summer bridge program.
Appendix A

Recruitment Email (Sole Recruitment Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Shariva White Requests your Participation

Hello Thrive Institute Participants,

I hope all is well. As you all know, I am the Student Success Coordinator and I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your first semester experience at Queens University of Charlotte. The expected time commitment is between two and three hours over the course of three interactions (two in person, one either in over the telephone or via email). Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not contact me at my Northeastern University email address regarding this study, you will never be contacted again about the study.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at white.shar@husky.neu.edu. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Best,

Shariva White
Appendix B

Recruitment Email (Researcher to Student)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Shariva White

Dear (Student),

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As you know, my name is Shariva White and I am currently working on my doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Education degree program at Northeastern University under the guidance of Dr. Joseph McNabb.

I am researching what it means for historically underrepresented college students who participated in a summer bridge program to experience their first semester in college. My intent is to learn more about what it is like for first-generation, Pell Grant eligible, and minority students to traverse through their first semester and to share this information with faculty, staff, and administrators that provide support to students. Not much is known about historically underserved students and the development of self-efficacy in particular, the group impact of collective efficacy and support systems for high-need students.

These students will come from one or more of the following demographic groups: first-generation, low-income, and/or racial/ethnic minority. They will be first-time full-time college students coming directly from high school with an age range of 18 – 19 years of age. Both males and females will be included in the study and all racial/ethnic groups

For this study, I am recruiting participants that meeting the following criteria:

- First-generation
- Low-income (Pell Grant eligible)
- Racial/ethnic minority
- Applied and accepted into the 2017 summer bridge program
- 18-19 year of age
- Completed at least one semester at Southeastern

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have three interactions with me. The first interaction is an in person meeting that will last approximately 30 minutes. I will ask you to fill out a short form with information about yourself, you will select a pseudonym to protect your identity, you will be presented with a consent form, and you can ask me questions about the study. The second interaction is an in person meeting that will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. This meeting will be an in-depth interview about your experience as summer bridge program participant. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. I have attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance. Finally, you may choose to meet in over the phone or send me an email for the third interaction. I will provide you with the transcript of our in-depth interview and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify points of
confusion or inaccuracy. In total, these interactions are expected to take about two or three hours of your time.

Based on your availability, I would like to propose __________ as the time for our first meeting in Sykes 123 interview room.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please email me (white.shar@husky.neu.edu) or call me (704.488.5539) if you have any questions.

Best,

Shariva White
Appendix C - Consent

Informed Consent Form
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Summer Bridge Programs and the Impact on Historically Underserved Students’ First Semester Experiences

Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. Joseph McNabb, Northeastern University
Co-Investigator: Shariva White, Northeastern University

Purpose: I am inviting you to take part in a research study. The study will explore the experiences of historically underrepresented student participants in a summer bridge program and its impact on their first semester in college. My intent is to learn more about what it is like for first-generation, Pell Grant eligible, and minority students to traverse through their first semester. You are being invited to participate in this study because you applied and was accepted to participate in the program and you meet the Title III grant’s program criteria for being classified as a “high-need” student. This study will involve three points of contact with the researcher, two in person and one either in on the phone or via email. The first point of contact will be an initial meeting with the researcher (approximately 30 minutes). The second point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The third point of contact will be a follow-up conversation with the researcher. You can elect to hold this meeting in over the phone (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

The purpose of this research study with first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students in a summer bridge program is to understand how they make meaning of their first semester experience after participating in a pre-college summer bridge program and expanding the body of knowledge about high-need student experiences.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews. As noted above, we will have three points of contact: two in person and one either in person or via email. For in person interviews, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your experience as a first-generation, low-income, or minority student. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the
researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to be a historically underserved student, particularly during your first semester in college. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for first-generation, low-income, and minority students on college campuses.

Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and socio-economic status will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating “pass.”

Will it cost me anything to participate?
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you on campus.

Contact Person: Please contact Shariva White at (704) 488-539 or via email at white.shar@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Joseph McNabb who is overseeing my research at j.mcnnabb@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part                              Date
______________________________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above                                                Date
______________________________________________________________________________
Shariva White, Student Researcher                                           Date
Appendix D - Interview

Interview Guide
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

1. What was your experience like applying to college?
   Possible prompts: Why were you interested in going to college?

2. Can you tell me about why you decided to apply to the summer bridge program?
   Possible prompts: What did you hope to gain from participating in the program?

3. What does it mean to you to be considered “historically underserved”?
   Possible prompts: What aspects of your identity do you see as first-generation? low-income? Minority?

4. Can you describe your experience participating in the summer bridge program?
   Possible prompts: Were you pleased? What was your initial thoughts? How did you feel during that week?

5. Can you tell me about your first semester experience?
   Possible prompts: How are your classes? Social engagement?

6. What is like to be a historically underserved student at Queens?
   Possible prompts: What assumptions do others make about you because you are high-need?

7. What programs or workshops did you attend during the summer bridge program that had the most impact on your experiences during your first semester?
   Possible prompts: How did you feel during the program? How do you feel now?

8. How did you utilize lessons learned in the summer bridge program during your first semester?
   Possible prompts: How did you apply what you learned to academic and social situations?

9. How do you respond when faced with problems and tasks assigned in your courses?
   Possible prompts: Do you talk to professors? Friends? Seek tutoring?
10. When faced with challenges in your hardest course, what did you do?
Possible prompts: Do you give up? Step back and regroup? Take a mental break?

11. Describe how you persevere on class projects even when there are challenges?
Possible prompts: What do you do to keep pushing when all odds are against you?

12. Can you tell me about the people you turned to for support?
Possible prompts: Who did you talk to? What type of advice did they give you? How did they help you?

13. When you make decisions about your academic and social expectations, how do you stay motivated?
Possible prompts: To what extent do your influence your own decisions? Friends?

14. Thinking back about what it was like to be challenged last semester, what could/did you do to overcome those obstacles?
Possible prompts: What resources would have been helpful? Would you have liked more or less support?
Appendix E – Biographical Information

Participant Questionnaire
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Personal Information

Today’s date: ________________________________
Full name: ___________________________________
Pseudonym: _________________________________
Date of birth: ________________________________

Title III Grant High-Need Categories

Of the following categories, please list all that apply
First-generation student
Pell Grant eligible
Racial/ethnic minority (please state)

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Academic History

Major: _____________________________________
Year of study: ______________________________
Credits Enrolled: ____________________________

Why did you decide to attend Southeastern University?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
References


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