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Successful Pedagogical Practices for First-Generation College Students

Jennifer Mahon

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SUCCESSFUL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES FOR
FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this exploratory study is to assess the ways in which instructors teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus come to understand these students as being different from other students they teach, and if and how they develop teaching practices and pedagogies more effective for first-generation students. There is a shift within higher education as, for the first time, students from non-traditional, often disadvantaged backgrounds are attending college in rising numbers. Despite the large number of first-generation students in postsecondary institutions, there are distinct challenges and disadvantages faced by this student population, due to vastly different experiences in their childhood and limited capital. Now that access to college is available to a much broader array of students than in the past, educators must adapt to the changing characteristics of the students in their classroom (Betances, 2006). The practices and policies that are currently in place may not benefit students of a nontraditional background, like first-generation college students.

Following interviews with 11 faculty members at a branch campus of a public university, the findings revealed that the faculty in the study encountered numerous challenges with first-generation students, with many lacking the preparation needed to teach this population. However, several strategies emerged that can positively impact retention and increase first-generation students' capital. The seven key practices that came out of the study included a focus on faculty development and pedagogical

training, ongoing collaboration between faculty and administrators, teaching with enthusiasm, encouraging students to take ownership of their education, clarity in expectations, descriptive and timely feedback, and real-world application of material using students' life experiences. Implementing these practices will allow instructors to create opportunities for success for first-generations students and improve retention among this particular population of students.

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To my daughter: Every time I wanted to give up, I thought about what I would tell you. I hope you know that the world is yours and I cannot wait to see what you accomplish. You are loved more than you know.

The long days and nights of writing were made just a little easier with my best "furfriend", Glitter, by my side.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a scenario such as this: A student meets up with a friend after just getting out of his undergraduate Sociology class. The friend asks, “How was class?” and the student, obviously frustrated, launches into a litany of complaints: “The teacher is boring”, “I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing,” “I can’t figure out why I made a “C” on the last paper,”.

Now imagine this scenario: An instructor runs into a colleague just after getting out of their undergraduate Sociology class. The colleague asks, “How was class?” and the instructor, obviously frustrated, launches into a litany of complaints: “I don’t understand what is going on, I am doing the exact same thing in both sections of this class. In the afternoon section, I get an enthusiastic response, with students talking a lot in class and doing impressive work but in the evening section, you know, the one that I teach at a branch campus, the students just sit there and stare at me, and their assignments are considerably poorer than the first section.”

The above situations may be conversations you have heard, or even had yourself. As the scenarios describe, there are times when the classroom experience is not a positive one for either students or the instructor, and the learning experience is not an effective one. From the instructor’s point of view, there are several ways to approach the course section that appears to be having trouble. First, it is possible that the instructor is content “going through the motions”, not caring if the students are learning, because they receive a paycheck no matter what. A second option may be that the instructor takes a stance and determines that because this was the way they were

taught, and because this is the type of material and level of difficulty that needs to be covered, they will move forward without making any changes and figure that there will be students who can keep up and excel, and those who cannot keep up will fall behind, and that's just the way it is. If most of the students who "fall behind" are at the branch campus, well, maybe that is just a sign that they do not really belong in college. A last option is that the instructor will determine that, since techniques which work in the course section taught at the main campus do not work in the section taught at the branch campus, each location requires a distinct approach. The instructor adjusts their assignments and teaching style and, through trial and error, finds a more effective approach for the students at the branch campus.

As one can see from the scenarios described above, the ideal classroom situation does not always exist. How instructors make sense of, and respond to, college students who are not prepared to learn in the manner the instructor is initially prepared to teach them has important ramifications for the academic viability of marginal students. The sense-making of, "You are not prepared for college" evokes a quite different response than that of, "The college is not prepared for you." To get beyond the mindset of "the student is the problem" requires rethinking the mid-20th century world of a pipeline feeding high school graduates from middle- and upper-class, predominantly white families into colleges and universities, students raised in households with college-educated parents and prepared for college work in first-rate public or private schools. The more students are fed into colleges and universities from alternative pipelines – from the military, from a later-point in the life course, from less academically-robust inner-city and rural schools, from families where neither parent has more than a high

school degree, and perhaps not even that -- the more institutions and individual faculty must ask the question, "To what extent do these students need to adjust to the university, and to what extent does the university need to adjust to accommodate these students?"

One reason for this may be that the students in your classroom are first-generation. A student is considered "first generation" if neither parent graduated from college (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Nearly 50 percent of college students meet this definition and this figure is rising (Hirudayaraj, 2011). While first-generation students now make up an increasing percentage of the student body at U.S. colleges and universities, they are not necessarily making up a higher percentage of graduates (Pryor, Eagan, Palucki, Hurtado, Berdan, & Case, 2012). At the same time, public colleges and universities feel the pressure from accrediting bodies to improve graduation rates. Just over 38% of all college students graduate within four years. This number drops eleven percentage points, to 27%, when just looking at four-year graduation rates of first-generation students (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, Tran, 2011).

Despite the large number of first-generation students in postsecondary institutions, there are distinct challenges and disadvantages faced by this student population which may prevent them from achieving success in higher education and graduating (Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004; Nuniez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Several factors make it difficult for first-generation college students to complete their degree, for example, many first-generation students doubt their academic ability (Tym, McMillion, Barone, Webster, 2004) and often lack the institutional knowledge to navigate admissions, enrollment, financial aid and other areas of college (Hottiger &

Rose, 2006). Hsiao (1992) found that first-generation students have “false expectations” when it comes to understanding the academic experiences in college and tend to have a lack of preparation and a solid support system. Additionally, many first-generation students experience role conflict, as they struggle with balancing their home life, work, school, and other activities (Petty, 2014), which leads to an inability to function and thrive in any of the roles (Hsiao, 1992). As the statistics show, the number of students with some college education but no degree to show for their time and effort, will be a continuing challenge for higher education.

Problem Statement

Historically, opportunities to obtain a college degree have been limited for certain populations, particularly racial and ethnic minorities (students of color) and the poor (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). However, there is a shift within higher education as, for the first time, students from non-traditional, often disadvantaged backgrounds are attending college in rising numbers (Betances, 2006). This shift is largely driven by a combination of economic changes, government policy, and university action. With respect to the economy, it is projected that by 2020, 65% of jobs will require some sort of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). To meet this need, government has created assistance programs to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds gain access to a college degree (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). At the same time, universities are actively recruiting first-generation students to increase enrollment (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014). Now that college access is available to a much broader array of students than in the past, educators are likely going to have to adapt to the changing characteristics of the students in their classroom

(Betances, 2006). The practices and policies that are currently in place may not benefit students of a nontraditional background, like first-generation college students.

Engle and Tinto (2008) reported that first-generation students are nearly four times more likely to leave higher education institutions without a degree when compared to their counterparts. In an ongoing, longitudinal study of thousands of students at diverse colleges across the nation, it was found that two-thirds of students saw their motivation stay the same or decline, with the largest drop occurring during the first year (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Among first-generation college students, their motivation for a college degree primarily centers on financial gain and a means to help their family (Bui, 2002). Motivation can also be tied to grades, with those who get low grades becoming less engaged and those who get high grades becoming focused on the grade rather than on learning.

While faculty may be unable to control all the factors affecting students and their inability to succeed in college, one thing they can exert some control over is what goes on inside the classroom. With the diverse backgrounds of students in the classroom, individualized instruction is an effective approach to helping set students up for success (McKeachie et al. 1986). It seems reasonable to presume that as instructors better understand the characteristics of first-generation college students, they can begin to develop teaching strategies that increase learning and retention among this population (Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this exploratory study is to assess the ways in which instructors teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus come to understand

these students as being different from other students they teach, and if and how they develop teaching practices and pedagogies more effective for first-generation students. In Chapter 2, an explanation of the lack of an easy fit between conventional university practices and first-generation skills-sets is explored. Colleges and universities have their own culture and norms, which first-generation students may struggle to understand (Aries & Seiders, 2005). Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital and habitus is used as a guide to understand why first-generation students struggle in college and how faculty can develop teaching practices to assist students past those obstacles. Through interviews with faculty members, a pattern of strategies emerged that provided an understanding for the pedagogical strategies most effective with this population.

Research Questions

This research sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus?
2. How prepared were faculty to teach first generation college students?
3. What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?

Significance

Instructors who teach a first-generation student population will appreciate the significance of this study, which offers important insights into instructional and retention policies. In some colleges and universities, tenure and promotion among faculty partially

depends on positive student evaluations, so it would make sense that faculty would want to gain information regarding successful practices in the classroom. Also, a classroom setting where the students are unengaged and disinterested can be emotionally draining for the instructors who teach the class. Graduation rates of first-generation college students remain low, so it is imperative that a different approach to instruction be taken to spark interest and learning in this student population, particularly as colleges and universities face increasing pressure to improve their graduation and retention rates. This study may also have an economic effect on society, as well as the debt acquired by students and their families. If we improve student success in college, an individual's odds of upward mobility will likely increase (Keeling & Hersh, 2011). By advancing pedagogical knowledge within higher education, instructors will have the resources to better meet the needs of first-generation students.

Research Site

This study focuses on the branch campus of a public university, where interviews with faculty members who taught there were completed during the Spring 2017 semester. At that time, approximately 230 students were enrolled. Typically, students applied to the main university but were accepted to this branch campus due to not meeting the academic standards. Through this option, students could attend the first-year, branch campus and take many of their general education and developmental courses. Upon successful completion of the year, students could then transition to the main campus to finish their degree. Ultimately, the population at this branch campus was composed primarily of minority, first-generation students from urban areas. Because the branch campus is in a rural area, culture shock is a common experience

among the students in attendance. Many student report having issues with adjusting to the rural community and do not feel welcome or accepted. Also, when compared to the main university, the branch campus has fewer resources such as a smaller library, no gym, fewer dining options, limited student organizations and activities, and less variety in the courses that students can take.

Researcher's Position Statement

My interest in this topic began in 2011 when I taught at the university used as the study site. From 2011 – 2014, I taught 2 undergraduate Principles of Sociology courses each semester, going back and forth between teaching at the branch campus and the main campus. Through casual conversations with students and faculty, as well as feedback gained from classroom observations from peers in the department, it became evident that at the branch campus an overwhelming majority of the students were first-generation and their performance in the classroom needed improvement. As a first-generation student myself and having acquired some background on the literature surrounding this population during my master's program in Counseling and & Student Personnel Services, I decided to adjust my teaching style to better meet the needs of the population that was in this classroom. While the course content and learning objectives remained the same at both campuses, the way I delivered material and conveyed expectations to the students changed.

Prior to being enlightened to the first-generation background of the students in my class at the branch campus, I assumed that students understood what office hours were and that a syllabus can be used as a reference guide to the course. I also did not spend much time providing guidance on note-taking and studying, and larger tests were

given approximately 2 times a semester, with written reflection assignments given multiple times. When students came to class unprepared (for example, not having completed the required reading), I put the blame on the students and continued to move forward, believing that the students would either step up or fail. Once I noticed that many students were “falling behind,” I realized that a change in pedagogy may benefit the students. Through trial and error, I adjusted my teaching style and changed the assignments. I gave numerous, smaller tests and assignments, as opposed to fewer tests that covered a large amount of material. Class time was also dedicated to talking with the students about effective note-taking and study habits. Through conversations with other faculty members, particularly those at the branch campus, that I experimented with classroom practices which they found to be successful.

After I made these changes I quickly noticed a considerable shift in the performance of the students. The average grade of the students in the class was higher, and to further reinforce my own perception of the value of these changes, my student evaluation scores rose. The significance of positive student evaluations is based on research that indicates students who are satisfied with their college experience are more likely to graduate and possess higher GPAs (Astin, 1984).

Because of my personal experience, I became convinced that students’ success in a classroom was partially dependent on the teaching strategy employed by the instructor. Once I adapted to the student population, students met the learning objectives and were satisfied with their learning experience (approximately 90% of student evaluations each semester ranked the class and instruction as Very Good or Superior). Based on this experience, I moved forward to investigate the types of

teaching strategies and classroom practices used by instructors who encourage success among first-generation students. By interviewing other instructors who teach first-generation college students, I was able to assess whether they have used similar strategies in their own classes or discovered other methods that work for them.

Key Terminology

Academic Success: Graduating from college with average to above average GPA.

Capital: Resources an individual accumulates over time which includes relationships, cash and property, and skills and habits (Bourdieu, 1986).

Completion: Students who graduate from an institution of higher education.

Cultural Capital: “Verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials” (Swartz, 1997, p.74).

First-generation college student: A student who does not have a parent with a college degree (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Habitus: The choices and behaviors one makes based on their perception of the social position they hold (Calhoun, 2007).

Integration: An attachment to academics and what occurs inside a classroom, as well as an ability to create relationships outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1993).

Pedagogy: A method or approach to teaching/instruction.

Retention: The measure at which students attending an institution one semester, enroll the following semester (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Traditional college student: A students who enrolls in college full-time, immediately after high school graduation, and completes a bachelor’s degree within four to five years.

Chapter Summary

With larger numbers of first-generation college students entering institutions of higher education, the graduation rates remain low as compared to the traditional student population (Pryor, Eagan, Palucki, Hurtado, Berdan, & Case, 2012). First-generation students face barriers unique to them and it is important that instructors understand the challenges these students face, so that they can meet their needs in the classroom. This exploratory study seeks to understand faculty experiences in the classroom, particularly those who primarily teach first-generation students, and to identify the teaching practices and strategies that are most successful. To do this, faculty were interviewed at a branch campus of a public university and the data was analyzed to address the research questions: *In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus? How much preparation and support were these instructors given for teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus? What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?*

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to assess the ways in which instructors teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus come to understand these students as being different from other students they teach, and if and how they develop teaching practices and pedagogies more effective for first-generation students. This chapter explores existing research around first-generation college students (FGCS), best pedagogical practices in higher education, as well as the theoretical framework used as a guide for the study. The discussion begins with an overview of the higher education system, followed by characteristics of first-generation students and the factors that impact their success, placed within the theory of Tinto and Bourdieu's work. Next, I discuss the literature on pedagogy within higher education, looking at both traditional pedagogy and best practices for teaching first-generation and underprepared students. The chapter concludes by discussing what I expect to find from the interviews from this study.

Higher Education and Student Success

College is a new environment for most students, with new challenges. They must separate from their primary group (family, high school friends), and adopt the norms of the new group (college) to succeed (Tinto, 1993). Successful integration in higher education occurs both academically (passing grades, satisfaction with major) and socially (faculty and peer interaction, campus involvement). When a student acclimates to the new environment and integrates in those two ways, they are more likely to succeed in college and less likely to drop out. Students who leave college are those

who are unable to effectively distance themselves from their family or community of origin and adopt the values and the behavioral patterns that typify the environment of the institution they are attending. Without such changes, students may not develop a sense of “fitting in” and a loyalty to the institution (Bean and Eaton, 2000).

There are six broad categories of factors which influence whether students successfully make the transition to college life, that is, persist (are retained) rather than dropping out. These factors include background, organizational, academic, social, environmental, and psychological (“College Student Retention”, n.d.). The background includes the level of parental support when attending college, high school experiences, educational level of parents, family income and college prep work (entrance exams, college courses). The organizational, academic, and social factors each focus on the institution. Organizational factors include financial aid, quality of orientation programs and campus organizations, as well as housing and counseling services; whereas, the academic factor focuses on the courses, faculty interaction and advising, class attendance, and overall satisfaction with the major the student chose. Social factors include the quality of friendships on campus, involvement in campus organizations, and whether students identify with a group at their college. For example, one indicator of college success, is the student’s level of engagement in their college surroundings (Astin, 1984). The more students engage in their campus community, the more they learn and grow. The type of engagement and involvement that Astin refers to is “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). Specifically, interaction with adults (faculty and staff, for example) tends to be related to the level of persistence and success a student has (Kuh, 2003).

Environmental factors that impact retention involve the student's level of financial resources, off-campus employment and if they have pre-existing relationships outside of college. Lastly, psychological factors such as self-confidence, motivation, the value placed on education and a sense of fitting in can all provide a glimpse into whether a student is likely to persist and succeed in college. Bean and Eaton (2000) present a compelling model of student retention which utilizes a psychological process that examines environmental variables and a student's intention and sense of self. The cumulative picture painted by research on student retention and success is that the more prepared the student is – academically, culturally, psychologically -- when s/he enters college, and the more support they receive – parental, organizational, financial – once in college, the more likely they are to meet the more rigorous academic standards of college-level work and to integrate into campus life. As you will see in the literature that follows, first-generation students often lack many of the “success factors” presented, which negatively impacts their success in higher education.

First-Generation Students

Several definitions for first-generation college students (FGCS) exist, but one of the most commonly used (and the one used for this study) is a student who does not have a parent with a college degree (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Parents' educational attainment plays a significant role in whether a student pursues higher education or not. According to Chenoweth and Galliher (2004), enrolling in college is more likely to occur if a student's parents have a college degree. Not only do first-generation students lack parents with a college education, but many do not have any

close family, friends, or peers with the knowledge of what it is like to apply, enroll and succeed in higher education.

This affects their level of preparedness and their inability to perform higher levels of work in college (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). There are also differences in the types of higher education that first-generation students pursue. First-generation college students are more likely to attend college part-time, and they are enrolling in for-profit colleges at higher rates than their peers (“First Generation Students in Higher Education”, 2016). Additionally, these students are more likely to attend a two-year college and participate in distance education. Using the “Factors Affecting Retention” as a guide, what follows is an explanation of how these factors impact first-generation students’ success in college.

Background

Family. First-generation college students confront distinctive challenges such as lack of family support and financial instability. Many students not only lack support from family but are persuaded to stay home due to the parents’ fear of their child entering a new culture (Schultz, 2004). During their time in college, when first-generation students finally acclimate to the college culture, they may face discouragement and alienation from their families (Tym, McMillion, Barone, Webster, 2004). This may be because attending college can be viewed as not following family tradition (Terenzini et al., 1994). This disconnect between the culture of the student’s family of origin and higher education also means first-generation college students come from families that may not be equipped to provide the student with the information he or she needs to adequately

prepare for the challenges or fully take advantage of the opportunities presented by college life (Petty, 2014).

Lareau (2003) followed several families for a number of years and gained great insight into how children are socialized with regards to their education. Two distinct styles of parenting emerged between the middle-class and lower-class families. Lower-class families promoted “the accomplishment of natural growth”, which included giving directives, in that the children were expected to obey without any explanation or discussion of direction (“Do it because I say so.”). In addition, the act of “playing” in the lower-class families was unstructured and not organized. These parents also did not take an active role in their children’s education. On the other hand, middle-class parents promoted “concerted cultivation” and were active participants in their children’s academics, always questioning and creating discussions around education. Children in middle-class families were enrolled in numerous organized activities and given experiences to encourage their talents and development. Middle-class parents also allowed their child to respond to questions on their own and the children were given opportunities to formulate their own thoughts and ideas, whereas an opposite approach was taken in lower-class families, where children were “talked down to”.

According to Lareau (2003), the style of parenting exhibited in middle-class families puts middle-class students at an advantage when entering college. Early on, middle-class parents encourage their children to have the confidence to actively question and participate in their own education, whereas this does not occur with lower-class families. The impact of this is that middle-class children learn how to have more sophisticated conversations, which can certainly help them as they attend college and

have their own conversations with faculty members and administrators, without their parents around. First-generation students from lower-income families are not as actively engaged in their college experience because they have not been taught how to do this (Pike and Kuh, 2005). For example, students with middle-class backgrounds tend to be at ease with the language used within college settings and have a clearer understanding of the behavior that is expected of them, something that is often assumed of students from other backgrounds (Aries & Seiders, 2005). This is the beginning of the social inequality that is reinforced in many colleges and universities and the misunderstanding that one's habitus (explained later in this chapter) is not natural, but culturally developed (Wacquant, 2005). Lareau's study is further discussed in this chapter along with the impact of capital and the theoretical framework and is also referenced in the final chapter where the findings are discussed.

High school coursework. In addition to family background, high school coursework is a strong predictor for succeeding in the first year of college (Pike and Saupe, 2002). One study found that first-generation students in high school took fewer academic hours and challenging courses in high school (Warburton, Burgarin, Nunez & Carroll, 2001). The National Center for Education published a report in 2001 titled, *Bridging the Gap: Academic Preparation and Post-Secondary Success Among First-Generation Students*. In this report, researchers examined the high school preparation among first-generation students and how persistence and degree attainment in postsecondary education is affected (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). One of the factors studied was the number of advanced Mathematics courses taken by high school students. When comparing first-generation students to students whose parents have a

college degree, it was found that first-generation students were less likely to take advanced mathematics course while in high school, as compared to their counterparts (20% to 34%, respectively). Adelman (1999) found that the level of mathematics studied in high school was one of the strongest predictors of success in college.

First-generation students are also less likely to enroll in AP courses and are not only less likely to take college entrance exams but those that did scored significantly lower than their peers whose parents had at least some college background.

Unfortunately, opportunities to take advanced mathematics courses is not always a possibility for all students and even those students with high intellectual capabilities tended to lean towards less rigorous programs and institutions (Bui, 2002).

Institution: Organizational, Academic and Social

The institution affects student retention by way of organizational, academic, and social factors. As discussed earlier, first-generation students do not receive much help, support, and advice from their family, due to a lack of knowledge and not understanding how higher education works (Kenny and Stryker, 1996). These students would benefit from the resources offered on a college campus such as orientation programs, counseling, and advising services. However, many first-generation students do not take advantage of these services because of their inability to navigate the higher education system. Also, the quality of the resources depends on the university, with some colleges offering more opportunities and support services than others. From an academic standpoint, when students interact in a positive manner with faculty and staff, they are more likely to experience academic success (Amelink, 2005). Unfortunately, many first-generation students do not ask questions or seek help from faculty (Jenkins, Miyazaki,

& Janoski, 2009). A finding synonymous with what Lareau (2003) discusses in her study. Social integration in higher education occurs inside and outside of the classroom. Whether a student persists at their education or not, can be related to the level of integration they experience at college (Kuh, 2003). First-generation students are typically not as engaged in their higher education as others, due to not understanding the importance of being involved, or not knowing how to become involved (Pike and Kuh, 2005). As discussed below in the environmental factor, when students have responsibilities at home or off-campus (such as living at home, working off-campus) they are unable to become involved at college. This may mean they do not form close friendships and are unable to join student organizations and groups, and ultimately never form an identity as a “college student”.

Environment

Most first-generation students come from low income backgrounds and continue to face financial constraints while they pursue a college education (Petty, 2014). Over the last 10 years, in-state tuition and fees at public four-year institutions increased 3.4% per year beyond inflation; meanwhile, 72% of first-generation college student's work while attending college. (The College Board, 2016). These students are also more likely to report higher debt following college than their counterparts (Gardner and Holley, 2011).

It may also be difficult for first-generation student to become involved in campus activities, if they are living and working off-campus, which is common for this population (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). A struggle with balancing home life and their college life is an ongoing struggle for many first-generation students, so they are less likely to

become involved in college activities and spend considerably less time devoted to their studies than traditional college students (Petty, 2014). This leads to conflicting roles, the culture of home and the culture of higher education, which leads to an inability to function and thrive in either role (Hsiao, 1992). As you will note, the environmental factor of a student (financial resources, family responsibilities, relationships and ties outside of college) can greatly impact the social factor (friendships on campus, involvement and identifying as a member of student organizations).

Psychological

First-generation students realize that earning a college degree is crucial to gaining equal footing with their peers, however they also face increasing doubt regarding their academic ability and whether they are “college material” (Tym, McMillion, Barone, Webster, 2004). Prior to entering college, first-generation students were found to have expectations of college that differ from those of non-first-generation students (Hicks 2006). With many first-generation students having lower educational education aspirations than the rest of the college student population (Terenzini et al., 1996), it was also discovered that they did not engage in activities as much as they thought they would prior to starting college (Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler, 1995). In a study by Pike and Kuh (2005), first-generation students were less engaged and unlikely to integrate into the college experience because they perceived the college environment as being unsupportive, as well as their own perception of their lack of progress in their development and learning.

Bourdieu's Concepts of Habitus and Capital

The American Dream casts the promise that each generation can do better than the last. Education has been the most common route to generational upward mobility, as shown in Figure 1. Closely associated with the American Dream is the belief that the United States is a meritocracy, that is, that individuals end up in the stratification hierarchy where they deserve. A meritocracy means that the upward trajectory shown in Figure 1 is a possibility not a guarantee. As seen through this account of the world, turning the American Dream into reality requires hard work, foregoing short-term pleasures for long-term goals, inculcating good habits, and just, in general, making sacrifices. Various sorts of talents and aptitudes help – a stellar high school athlete wins a scholarship, as might a math whiz. Yet the notion of “a person getting what they deserve” rests on the combination of these two attributes – aptitude and hard work – the person brings to the table.

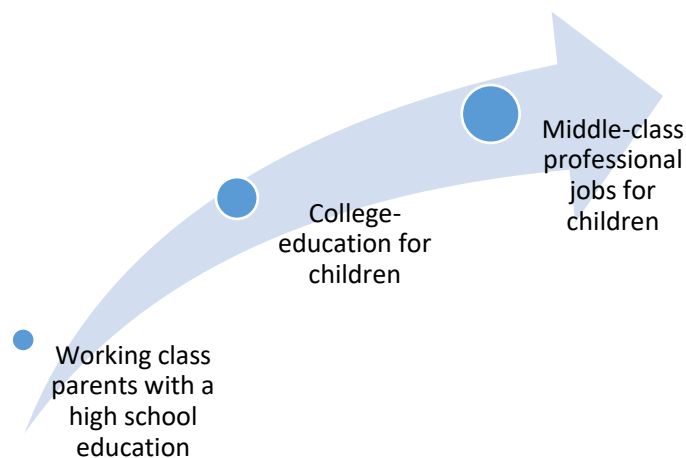


Figure 1. Upward mobility for students.

Findings from the empirical research reported in the last section belie the simplicity of this account, introducing a whole host of factors which cannot be attributed either to student's aptitude or hard work. Organizational support in such forms as financial aid, orientation programs, and remedial courses signal official recognition that not all students enter college with the optimal mix of preparation and support. Through these programs, it is the hope that students can find the support they need to overcome any limitations they have when arriving to college. We can think of these programs as methods to adjust "inputs" coming from alternative pipelines to the organizational and academic requirements of higher education. These methods require minor modifications around the periphery while leaving the vast swathe of the academic landscape untouched, including what goes on within the heart of undergraduate education, the classroom learning environment.

Work by the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggests such limited reform efforts may not be enough for many first-generation college students. Indeed, in contrast to the image of a meritocracy which provides equal opportunity to everyone, Bourdieu theorizes there are powerful mechanisms which operate to reproduce family class positions across generations. Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus provide an explanation of how first-generation students function in the college environment. Capital can be accumulated over time; the present study looks at the three types of capital -- cultural, economic, and social (Bourdieu, 1986). The quantities and types of capital which have accrued and circulate in individuals' lives shape their habitus, and habitus in turn determines how well individuals fit into different sorts of social environments. College instructors, traditional college students, and first-generation and

other non-traditional students all have habitus which need to be taken into account to explain college retention.

Economic capital refers to the resources an individual and/or family possesses such as cash and property. For students with economic capital stemming from their family, one can see how they are at an advantage compared to their peers who lack this form of capital. While financial aid has been created to fill this gap, many students (such as first-generation and lower income students) are forced to attend the school that has offered them ample financial aid to attend (Ra, 2001). Students whose family do not possess the economic capital to help them with tuition and books, as well as room and board, may be required to work part-time or full-time, as well as take out loans, simply to afford to attend school. This leaves less time available for academic work and increases stress. Students who come from families living at the economic margins may feel pressure to drop out of school to provide financial assistance to other family members. Students who come from families with higher levels of financial capital are also likely to come to college more academically prepared, as their parents can afford to live in neighborhoods with good public schools or else can afford to send their children to private schools.

Social capital refers to advantages gained from relationships and groups (Smith, 2007). Prior to attending college, students who have relationships and networks to help them succeed, are at an advantage and more likely to persist and graduate (Stanton-Salazar, Chavez, Tai, 2001). Such students may be able to navigate the unfamiliar college experience more easily because of the guidance and support provided to them from their relationships with family and other important figures (Prospero & Vohra-

Gupta, 2007; Saunders & Serna, 2004). Unfortunately, the students that could benefit from resources such as this (first-generation students) are often the ones with limited social capital.

As it pertains to college education, cultural capital is defined as “verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials” (Swartz, 1997, p.74). It is unequally distributed across social classes and Bourdieu (1973) has pointed out that while many students appear to be rewarded for their academic achievements, they are in fact being rewarded for having cultural capital. First-generation students typically lack cultural capital and therefore they (and their families) do not have the same understanding of the college application and enrollment process as their peers (Dumais & Ward, 2009). Because of this, children who possess cultural capital are more likely to go to college due to receiving higher rates of encouragement to pursue higher education, than those with little cultural capital. Cultural capital also plays an important role in academic success once in college. As Lareau (2003) found in her research, children from working-class families are more likely to be socialized to take direction from authority figures, while children from middle-class families are more likely to be socialized to display independence and autonomy. Lareau (2003) found that when K-12 students encountered issues in school, middle-class parents typically reacted and reached out to the authorities to address the situation. In contrast, lower-class parents did not intervene. Therefore, when the students of the lower-class parents encounter issues in college (such as a failing grade or not understanding the lecture), they do not even know it is an option to discuss their education with faculty. Whereas, middle-class

students find it easier to approach faculty, question their grades, and ask questions. This behavior can lead to the middle-class students having the advantage, while the others fall behind. Generally, students socialized to take direction from others will find it more challenging to maneuver college classrooms, which require high levels of self-direction.

Broader than just the classroom, colleges and universities have their own cultures, and students who possess a basic understanding of the norms of college before they attend, typically achieve success (Hennessy-Himmelheber, 2015). Therefore, a student with highly educated parents likely has more cultural capital than first-generation students, giving them an advantage when arriving to college. These advantages include a better understanding of the higher education system and an increased focus on personal and professional development and status attainment. Aries and Seider's (2005) found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience dissonance with understanding the cultural norms of higher education, leading them to feel like outsiders. Trying to adjust to a new environment can result in culture shock and is a common experience for many first-generation students (London, 1989).

The family, high school, and community a student grows up in shapes the habitus they bring to college. Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant, 2005). Bordieu (1986) describes habitus as having a "feel for the game" and knowing how to successfully navigate one's environment. Individuals are socialized and acquire habits that are deeply ingrained based on their social class. How someone acts and reacts is

based on the perception of their self and their understanding of the social position they hold (Calhoun, 2007).

An individual's perception of their choices is often due to their understanding of the social position they hold in relation to the world around them (Calhoun, 2007).

Habitus can help us to understand the type of college that students choose to apply to, as well as the majors that students select. The more closely aligned a student's habitus fits with the school (i.e. how one was socialized early on in life), the better their chances of success (Brooks, 2008).

We can bring these concepts from Bourdieu together to explain how traditional college students from middle- and upper-middle class families are able to take advantage of college to facilitate their achievement of the American Dream. As seen in Figure 2, those students come to college well prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that college provides.

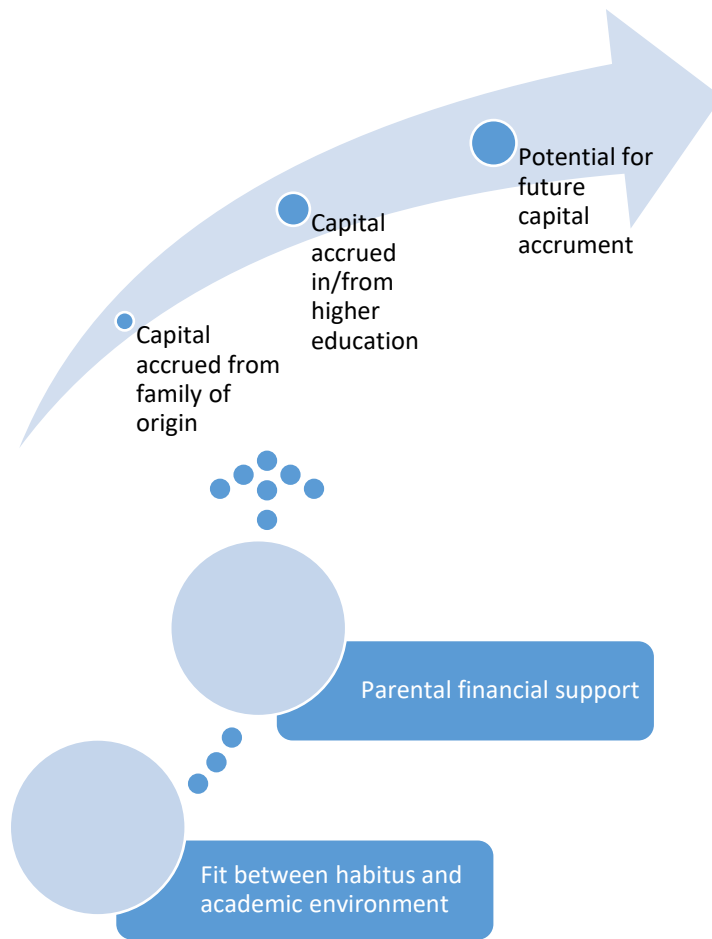


Figure 2. The path to capital accrual in college.

They are academically prepared, bring with them a habitus that fits well with the college environment, understand the need to pursue extracurricular activities and cultivate social networks, and are not distracted by the need to work long hours to pay for college. Receipt of a college degree, as well as the social and cultural capital they have accrued while pursuing their degree, can then be leveraged to accrue even more capital.

The situation can be quite different for first-generation college students. These students are more likely to be subjected to a variety of forces and deficiencies which may send them into a downward spiral, and lead to lower retention and graduation rates

of first-generation college students, as reported in Chapter 1. When first-generation students encounter these forces, they may not know how to handle them, which leads to them falling farther behind their peers. The pressures and obstacles which create a downward trajectory for many FGCS are displayed in Figure 3.

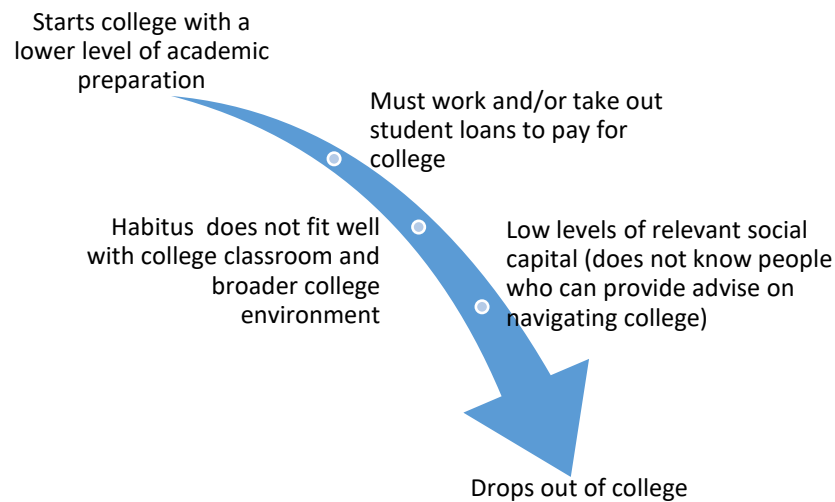


Figure 3. The downward trajectory of first-generation students.

Capital and habitus can assist in explaining the behavior of students in a college classroom, particularly those considered underprepared such as first-generation college students. An individual's comfort level in certain situations is based on their social location and where they feel most natural (Lareau, 2003). This explains why first-generation students may experience culture shock when they arrive to college (London, 1989). Particularly those who attend college farther away and live on campus. It is possible to adjust to a new environment and develop new habits later in life, but they may feel unnatural as compared to those learned in childhood (Lareau, 2003). Faculty can explain the norms of the classroom, and clarify expectations and guidelines, however it may not be natural for FGCS to adopt the college student role.

Bourdieu's theory is applicable to many facets of the college environment and college experience. This dissertation focuses on just one of these facets – the college classroom – and even more specifically on the instructors within those classrooms. In the next section this focus is pursued through the topic of pedagogy.

Pedagogy

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) conducts longitudinal studies on the American higher education system and routinely administers surveys which include the Freshman Year survey, College Senior Survey, and the HERI Faculty Survey. CIRP has collected data on over 1,900 institutions, 15 million students, and more than 300,000 faculty, and has demonstrated time and time again that interaction with faculty is an important aspect of the first-year experience and tied to greater gains in multiple cognitive and affective areas.

There are considerable differences in what is expected of faculty members, based on the type of institution and its size. Some universities focus on research and scholarship, while others are teaching-centered and/or have a specific population that is targeted (i.e. first –year colleges, community colleges, trade schools). Achieving teaching excellence, even with a traditional student population, can be challenging when faculty positions at a postsecondary institution of higher education often includes fulfilling the requirements of teaching, scholarship, and service (Theall, 2001). Much of the literature on pedagogy in higher education provides a framework for “excellent teaching,” particularly for the traditional student population. The literature reviewed below discusses characteristics of excellent instructors and the teaching methods they

employ for traditional students and non-traditional students (first-generation and underprepared college students).

Traditional College Teaching

There are several characteristics and classroom strategies that instructors can employ to achieve student success. A review of the literature revealed several personal characteristics that the best, most effective, instructors possess. Additionally, these teachers have a deep understanding of student development and learning and understand how to use this knowledge to teach in the classroom.

When it comes to teaching excellence, the teacher's personality and relationship with students of all backgrounds is just as important as sound knowledge of one's discipline. A strong student-faculty relationship can lead to high satisfied students, who are then inspired to learn (Bain, 2004). Research shows that college instructors who receive excellent ratings had the following characteristics in common: (a) enthusiasm, (b) clarity, (c) preparation/ organization, (d) stimulating interest and thinking about the subject matter, and (e) knowledge (i.e., the instructor's grasp of the subject matter and the instructor's love of and passion for the subject) (Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, and Reif, 1987). The importance of personality, motivation, and enthusiasm relate to findings in the literature which confirm that the teacher-student relationship is a key predictor of student success (Yoon, 2002). Students feel they learn more material when exposed to an enthusiastic instructor (Oesch, 2005). With enthusiasm, students find greater clarity in the course expectations, grading policy, and goals. In Oesch's study, identical grading policies are used in each of the study conditions, yet students felt that the enthusiastic instructor was fairer in his/her grading system. Angelo and

Cross (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1995) identified the following qualities of good teachers: Knowledge of subject matter, enthusiasm, allow students to express their views, interaction with students in and out of the classroom, and timely supportive feedback. Instructors who place an expectation of hard work and solid attendance tend to see higher academic achievement and a sense of responsibility from students increase (Berliner 1984). In addition to the above identified characteristics, is the concept that the best teachers also possess an understanding of student development and motivation. Kreber (2002) developed a general definition of teaching excellence which includes not only knowledge of one's field but an understanding of student development and growth that reaches beyond specific disciplines. To maintain student interest in the content, intrinsic rewards are a more effective motivator, as opposed to external rewards (grades). Intrinsic rewards encourage students to care about the success in the classroom and occur when teachers nurture learning and understand that their role is not to be a source of power over their students but to show investment in their student's learning (Bain, 2004). They trust their students and have faith in their abilities to learn. This helps to create an environment where students are comfortable accepting that their answers may be incorrect at times, but they continue to try again. Bain (2004) also discovered that instructors who treat their students with "simple decency" by having genuine conversations and open discussions about their own intellectual journeys, tend to know their students better and form stronger relationships leading to higher rates of success.

Effective teachers are not just subject matter experts, but they know how to break down the material to increase student's understanding (Bain, 2004). They

possess a deep understanding of their students and have an ability to explain concepts in meaningful ways. The best teachers understand that intelligence is expandable, and knowledge is constructed. Teachers must maintain high standards and challenge their students to leave their comfort zone through introspection and unsettling ideas (Filene, 2005). Learning goes beyond memorization but has a substantial influence on student's senses (how they think, act, and feel), and the way they perceive their reality. These teachers want students to experience a deeper learning, instead of surface learning. The best teachers know that it is critical that students are active participants in their own education. To do this, teachers are encouraged to seek commitments from their students and enforce that it is their choice to take the class and pursue the goals (learning objectives of the course) (Bain, 2004).

Effective teachers not only possess certain traits and have an understanding of student development and learning, but they are able to translate that knowledge into their teaching. Lectures and discussion groups remain two of the most popular and common forms of transmitting knowledge in the classroom, but each has its own benefits and limitations. Lectures are a cost-effective and efficient way to present information face-to-face, while focusing on key concepts and ideas (McKeachie, 2002). Unfortunately, many students today have become accustomed to more variety in the classroom and expect more than just lecture (Filene, 2005). There is also evidence that lecture does not succeed in getting students to learn because the teacher makes assumptions of what students already know, and most of the reflection is done by the lecturer and not the students (Finkel, 2000). This inhibits independent thinking and halts the development of cognitive skills (Filene, 2005).

Discussions can provide real value to the learning environment and engage students through conversation and participation. However, there are times when it is difficult to get students to discuss, or the discussion can get out of hand and invoke negative emotions based on what students say (McKeachie, 2002). An effective form of discussion that combats this issue, is to utilize small discussion groups, instead of a larger class discussion. Discussions are looked upon more favorably than lectures and provide a way to develop skill in critical thinking and problem solving, while teachers can give prompt feedback when there is a misunderstanding (Finkel, 2000).

There are alternative methods to teaching, outside of discussion and learning that can be just as effective as lecture and discussion. Cooperative peer learning uses small groups where students work together to solve a problem and reach a consensus. This encourages students to bond with each other, and can be effective with large classes (Bean, 2001). Exploratory writing uses in-class writing assignments with probing questions provided by the instructor and can be done at the beginning or end of class, with the use of learning journals or daily logs. Debates can promote critical thinking if there are clear, structured guidelines and adequate preparation (McKeachie, 2002). After the debate, it is important to have a class discussion to summarize what occurred. Role-playing works effectively if students are provided ample information beforehand and they understand that responses are to be improvised (Filene, 2005). Case methods describe situations that can be applicable to real life and require students to use the content they've learned to work through an issue (McKeachie, 2002). As Drummond states (1995), all of these strategies can be effective, especially when used in conjunction with lecture and discussion.

While faculty can control much of what goes on inside their classroom, there are matters which faculty cannot control. Multicultural barriers exist on all levels; including student, faculty, and institutional barriers. Issues such as language barriers and institutional constraints (not having the proper resources) have all been shown to impact teaching (Khaja, Springer, Bigatti, Gibau, Whitehead, & Grove, 2011). Curriculum barriers should also not be overlooked, when it comes to effective teaching. At times, faculty members disagree about what students need to learn. The knowledge, skills, and values that are important when students graduate and move on to careers, tends to differ depending on who you may talk to in the field (DaRosa, Skeff, Friedland, Coburn, Cox, Pollart, O'Connell, & Smith, 2011).

Teaching First-Generation/Underprepared College Students

As you will see throughout this study, first-generation students come to college with characteristics different than the traditional student population. Effective teaching practices for FGCS encourage faculty to embrace and utilize these differences in a way that leads to successful academic outcomes (Betances, 2006). While little research exists about the most effective classroom strategies for first generation college students, the few studies that have been done provide characteristics and classroom practices that contribute to success when working with first-generation students. Gabriel (2008) suggests giving students an assignment during the first week of class, to find out why they are taking the class, what they hope to learn, and if they have any background on the topic. This can help to identify at-risk and underprepared students. With this information, faculty can be powerful allies to first-generation students by helping them overcome obstacles and navigate the college environment.

Encouragement. Instructors with first-generation students in their classroom are urged to be critical of their own pedagogy and remain compassionate and encouraging to this population, who often need additional support. Rather than view these students as “stupid” and “lazy”, instructors are encouraged to change their perspective and look at these students as not having the same opportunities as their peers. Since at-risk students typically have no idea what it takes to succeed in college, they often experience shock from the time commitment required and are in need of a positive influence in their life (Gabriel, 2008). For many first-generation students, encouragement from faculty (be it to pursue a major, transfer from a community college to a four-year college, or other) was all that was needed to continue pursuing their college education and succeed (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001).

Ownership. Not only do these students need encouragement to persist at their education but instructors can impact first-generation and other underprepared students by encouraging them to accept responsibility for their learning and progress in the classroom (Gabriel, 2008). Effective instructors understand that learning ability is not fixed and academic habits can change. When instructors remain open, they can involve first-generation students in a collaborative discussion about their needs. The more a student engages in their own learning, the more they will grow and develop (Astin, 1984). Filkins & Doyle (2002) agree that there are great benefits when first-generation students participate in a collaborative learning process and take ownership of their education.

Clarity. First-generation and other at-risk students typically face two obstacles within the college classroom; not knowing how to study and an inability to understand

the difference between essential and nonessential information (Gabriel, 2008). By meeting students where they are at, they will feel empowered and continue to stay motivated. However, even with this knowledge, professors should never lower standards and do for students what they can do for themselves. To assist students in overcoming these obstacles, faculty should provide a clear and concise outline of their expectations. First-generation students perform better when they understand what is expected of them (Collier & Morgan, 2008), a pattern which fits with the childrearing style of working-class parents, as reported by Lareau (2003). This practice also helps students to identify the norms of the classroom environment and provides them with a proper understanding of their role as a college student. Guidelines and class expectations should be spelled out in the syllabus, and discussed in the classroom (Gabriel, 2008). The syllabus can also be used as a learning tool by giving a quiz on the syllabus during the start of the semester, and by not just listing campus resources in it but taking an active approach with students and really encouraging them to utilize those resources.

Grading and attendance. Methods of assessment and grading can also be adapted to meet the needs of first-generation students. The literature supports multiple grading opportunities for first-generation students, as opposed to just 1 or 2 exams during the semester and shows that thorough, immediate feedback (beyond letter grades and percentages) improves success (Gabriel, 2008). Another suggestion for faculty of first-generation college students is to offer private, extended office hours to students who score a 75% or lower on the first exam or major assignment (Gabriel, 2008).

While attendance can be an issue for instructors with students of any background, it is particularly a struggle for those who teach at-risk students. Research favors taking attendance each class. It is recommended that instructors offer participation points and have daily graded assignments, to encourage attendance. Another way to increase attendance is by learning students' names and helping the students in the class learn each other's name (Gabriel, 2008).

Classroom culture. The atmosphere of a college classroom can be a contributing factor to student motivation, particularly when the class is viewed as a community, while still holding students accountable for their individual grades and progress. Promoting a community culture in the classroom can be done by creating assignments that encourage students to work together and discuss with one another. It is inevitable that disruptions and misbehaviors will occur, so it is crucial that these behaviors are addressed and not ignored. Instructors can also use the overall well-being of the class by suggesting that leaving early or arriving late disrupts the entire class. Students in the classroom should be encouraged to have respect for one another and the instructors must lead by example and exhibit a positive attitude (Gabriel, 2008). When first-generation students encounter obstacles, it is the instructor that can help them overcome it, which will leave the student feeling more empowered and able to persist against future obstacles.

A Comparison of Traditional and Non-Traditional Student Pedagogy

There is much more research that has been done on pedagogy with traditional college student populations, however the literature on teaching first-generation students is increasing. While there are several comparisons that can be made, a notable number

of differences can be found when teaching students of a traditional background versus first-generation students. A breakdown of the comparisons and differences can be seen in Figure 4.

Teacher Training for Faculty

According to The American Association of University of Professors, approximately 70 percent of current faculty positions in colleges and universities are primarily teaching positions (Alsop, 2018). “It has been sarcastically noted that college teaching is the only profession requiring no formal training of its practitioners” (Allen & Reuter, 1990, p. 9). Unlike K-12 teachers who often have a background in education and teaching, most faculty receive little to no training prior to instructing students (Cahn, 1978). Upon hiring, the assumption is that because they were students they already know how to teach (Drummond, 1995).

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty with students of all backgrounds in their classroom can benefit from having an understanding of student development and motivation. • Acknowledge and teach in a way that an instructor assumes learning is not fixed and academic habits can change. • The teacher-student relationship is a key predictor of success. • Students from traditional and non-traditional backgrounds are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and progress. • Faculty should maintain high standards for all students. 	
Key Differences	TRADITIONAL STUDENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on getting students to engage in deep learning versus surface learning. • Most effective teaching method involves lecture and discussion. • Have genuine conversations with students, while also discussing one's own intellectual journey. • Emphasize hard work and solid attendance. 	FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on clarity in assignments and syllabus, with classroom guidelines and expectations. • Most effective teaching method involves interactive activities. • Have conversations with students about their own educational needs and involve them in the decisions. • Emphasize class community, particularly the impact on the class when disruptions and misbehaviors occur. • Feedback is important and should be immediate, descriptive and thorough.

Figure 4. Comparison of pedagogy. Adapted from Bain (2004), Filene (2005), Filkins & Doyle (2002), Finkel (2000), Gabriel (2008), McKeachie (2002).

The Teaching Assistant (TA) position was developed out of a need to provide graduate students with formal training to teach, so they can be prepared upon accepting their first position as a faculty member at a college (Boehrer & Sarkisian, 1985). Doubt and insecurities arise with graduate students who soon realize they are supposed to know *how* to teach, but then quickly realize they don't. If a graduate student is looking to expand their career into higher education, it makes sense they should take coursework

in pedagogy and educational methods, instead of just focusing on research (Johnston, 1997). However, the argument against this is that it would increase the length of time it takes to complete the degree.

Faculty development programs were created to provide current instructors with knowledge on the best and most effective classroom strategies and teaching practices. However, it is still up for debate if they have improved the quality of instruction in college classrooms. For now, and at most universities, emphasis on research and publications is what is required of professors to receive tenure (Milton, 1972; Hiatt, 1981). While there has historically been little emphasis on “teaching the teachers” at the postsecondary level, advancements have been made to assist graduate students and instructors in understanding pedagogy and developing their teaching style.

Theoretical Framework: Andragogy and Critical Pedagogy

First-generation students are typically nontraditional adult learners that require a different level of teaching to succeed in the classroom. There are two theories that can assist instructors in their work with first-generation students. Andragogy emphasizes how adult learners receive and process information but can be applied to first-generation students, who exhibit similar backgrounds and challenges when attending college (Knowles, 1990). Critical theory seeks to raise students’ awareness and challenges traditional education by applying social justice principles (Adams, Bell, Goodman & Joshi, 2016).

Andragogy

Pedagogy is the practice of teaching which commonly focuses on the instructor helping children learn (Yoshimoto, Inenaga & Yamada, 2007). To better understand the

practice of teaching first-generation students, a unique population that requires a different method of teaching, andragogy is a better application for this study, as it refers to helping adults learn. There are six principles within this theory, also known as adult learner assumptions, which include the need to know, self-concept, role of the learner's experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation (Houde, 2006).

The need to know principle is ensuring that adults understand the value of what they are learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). This is accomplished by leading the learner to discover why the knowledge is worth learning, or what the consequences would be of not learning. There is evidence that when adult students do not understand the purpose of what they are learning, their motivation decreases (Houde, 2006). One way that instructors can show the value of the learning material is by providing a real-world application.

Self-concept refers to a learner becoming independent and taking control of when and how they learn (Knowles, et al, 1998). Adults find fulfillment when they believe they are responsible for their lives. They also have a need to be seen as capable students, in the eyes of their instructor. Their prior experiences with schooling made them dependent learners, so faculty must move them into their new role of being responsible for their education. This can be done by providing students with multiple opportunities to present and discuss their views during class and by building in a variety of reflection opportunities to keep students on track with their progress.

The experience of adult learners can be used within the classroom to enrich discussions and to get students to relate to one another. This principle touches on a very distinct aspect of andragogy, as opposed to pedagogy. While it can be argued that

children also have life experiences, the broad and diverse experiences that adults can bring to the classroom can be used as a much greater tool for learning. Many adults tie their identities to their past experiences and rejecting (or ignoring) their experiences could mean rejecting the student (Knowles, et al, 1998).

Andragogy assumes that adults are maturing and fulfilling multiple roles while also being a student. Adult learners must be in a position where they are ready and willing to learn, while still meeting the demands of their day-to-day lives. At this point in an adult's life, their learning should closely relate to their social roles and help them in preparing for any real-world situations they may encounter.

Like having a readiness to learn, orientation to learning focuses on learning through problem-solving. New material is taught by applying it to address practical issues. As opposed to focusing on getting the adult learner to learn (as discussed in the readiness to learn principle), this principle looks to engage the adult learner while they are learning. Within this principle is a change from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application (Knowles, 1980).

Adult learners are often motivated internally (self-esteem, recognition), as opposed to external motivators (grades) (Knowles, et al, 1998). With this knowledge, teachers can adjust their rewards system to better fit the needs of adult learners by offering praise and instilling confidence, as opposed to focusing on letter grades and percentages. Instructors should also find ways to set up students through success, which can be done by offering positive, descriptive feedback, or designing activities that allow students to bring in their own experiences and apply the content to real-world issues, as discussed in the principles above.

How does this apply specifically to first-generation students? Research found that when andragogy was applied to high school students, they were able to engage in self-directed learning by their junior and senior year (Merriam, Baumgartner, and Caffarella, 2007). Therefore, first-generation students need not be older adults for this to benefit them (Knowles, 1984). This is important because the first-generation students at the focus of this study are, on average, not considered to be older adults, with the majority of them coming to college immediately after high school.

Earlier, I discussed several challenges affecting first-generation students, with many of them having diverse backgrounds, limited academic preparation, and doubting their academic ability regarding whether they are college material (Tym, McMillion, Barone, Webster, 2004). To combat this, instructors are encouraged to create a collaborative learning environment where students can share their past experiences, and the teacher makes connections from their experiences to the material being learned. By sharing experiences, students may relate to one another and begin to build relationships with their peers, which will increase the chance that first-generation students stay engaged and become more integrated in their college experience. This group of students will also benefit from a problem-centered focus and real-world application of the material being taught, as outlined in the principles of andragogy. Since many first-generation students come to college without little understanding and knowledge of higher education, they may not yet value knowledge for the sake of learning. Therefore, educators should always focus their teaching on solving problems and applying the content to the students' lives. Because much of andragogy encourages self-directed learning, the classroom environment should be respectful and

supportive, and a mutual understanding should exist between teachers and students that students are capable in assisting with planning their own learning (student-directed learning).

Critical Pedagogy

Explicit curriculum (learning plan set by the teacher/school) and hidden curriculum (unwritten, unofficial lessons such as values) are common components of the formal schooling that occurs in the United States (Adams et al, 2016). This curriculum reflects the inequality that exists in our education system. Students are expected to be compliant, while experts pour knowledge into their empty heads, otherwise known as “banking education” (Friere, 1970). Teachers control their passive students, while they are viewed as individuals not connected to one another. The experiences that students bring with them are given no attention and reality is seen as unchangeable. This type of educational system is what maintains oppression in society. The less students question things, the better they fit into the education system that has been created by the oppressors.

The critical pedagogy approach to education aims to engage those who have been oppressed by drawing on their life experiences and what they already know and providing them with the resources to become engaged in today’s world. According to Friere (1970), education is to be viewed as the means to transform oppressive structures and create equality through action. Known as the “problem-posing model” (the opposite of “banking education”), students begin to understand that their problems are constructed and view themselves as separate from their activity. Critical pedagogy encourages instructors to identify resources, initiate dialogue about experiences that

students have, identify problems and challenges that relate to their lives, and seek to transform society by working together as partners. In this type of educational system, everyone is connected, and reality is ever-changing. Guided by Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Friere (1970) believed his work should be recreated and adapted to fit changing realities. Freire stressed that knowledge is political and that certain perspectives are favored over others, which oppresses certain socio-economic and racial/ethnic groups (Boyd, 2008). To counter this, the culture and experience of students should be a relevant and important component in learning, which can be done through dialogue. True dialogue is where individuals reach a deep understanding with each other through lived experiences (Friere, 1970). Together, teachers and students can unveil reality and co-create knowledge. Students become aware of their position in society and the forces that have ruled them and shaped their consciousness. This awareness leads to students gaining the necessary tools to begin to change the system that oppressed them in the first place.

There are challenges that first-generation students will face when encountering critical pedagogy in the classroom. As Lareau's study of parenting styles discovered, lower to working class children were taught to be passive and obedient when it came to their education. This is a prime example of the education system oppressing youth, particularly those from a lower social class. Critical pedagogy would encourage instructors to create knowledge with the student and to insist that students use their own experiences to make sense of their reality. In this type of classroom, students learn from a position of agency, with the intent of expanding their agency (Giroux, 2010). Agency refers to the ability to act independently and exhibit free choice (Barker, 2005). First-

generation students can benefit from the student-teacher relationship that is central to critical pedagogy, as the encouragement they receive from faculty can be a key factor in how far they go in their education (Cejda & Kaylor 2001).

Conceptual Framework/Summary

Based on the literature, the following discussion includes what I expect to find from my interviews with instructors at the study site. With the number of first-generation students attending college on the rise, classrooms are full of students from varying backgrounds, which can pose a challenge to instructors. There is quite a bit of existing literature on student success in college and the factors that increase a student's chance of being successful and graduating. Some of the key factors include engagement outside of the classroom and social and academic integration (Astin, 1984; Tinton, 1993). However, engagement and integration can prove to be a barrier to first-generation students who arrive at college with a lack of understanding of the social norms and ways of the college environment, as well as an inability to fully integrate if they are working off-campus and living at home (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

As reviewed above, literature identifies numerous best practices for faculty to follow, to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and providing opportunities for all to succeed. However, a lot of these best practices do not consider the backgrounds that first-generation students come from. Bourdieu's concept of capital helps to explain for why first-generation students do not graduate. When students arrive to college with limited capital, they tend to be unable to overcome the barriers and challenges they face, because of the limited resources they have. This results in students dropping out and decreased retention rates in universities. Andragogy and critical pedagogy provide

theoretical frameworks for using an adult learner approach (andragogy) and their lived experiences (critical pedagogy), as well as encouraging students to take ownership of their education to tackle real-world issues. However, more research needed around specific classroom strategies that are effective with underprepared, first-generation students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to interview faculty who primarily teach first-generation students to find out what practices they use to help these students achieve success. To overcome the barriers that many first-generation students encounter, effective pedagogy and classroom strategies are needed to best reach out to those with limited capital, in order to achieve success and increase retention. See Figure 5.

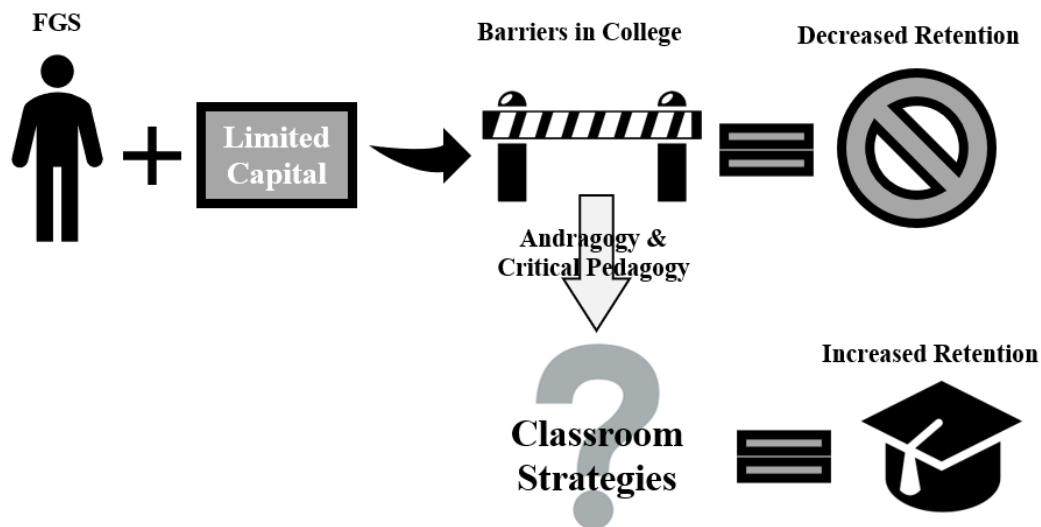


Figure 5. Conceptual framework: Effective classroom strategies assist first-generation students, with limited capital, in overcoming the barriers they face in the college classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this exploratory study is to assess the ways in which instructors teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus come to understand these students as being different from other students they teach, and if and how they develop teaching practices and pedagogies more effective for first-generation students. This chapter provides the details of the research methods used to address the research questions, descriptions of the methodology, sample and research site, interviews, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Study Design, Rationale, and Significance

This qualitative, exploratory research is a cross sectional study of faculty who teach first-generation students. A phenomenological approach was taken to better understand the experiences of individuals through the use of interviews, in order to draw out their reality (Richards and Morse, 2007). In this study, it was the experiences of faculty members who taught first-generation students that is of interest. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven faculty members who taught at a branch campus of a public university. This branch campus was chosen because of its' predominant first year, first-generation student population at the time the study was conducted and the researcher's familiarity and access to the campus. Interview questions were open-ended and used to address the research questions. This research has implications for student success and retention, due to the academic troubles experienced by many first-generation students, as discussed in the literature review. Outcomes of this study can be used to inform future teachers and administrators, as they develop more effective ways of supporting this population.

Researcher Positionality

When conducting this research, I was aware of my background and potential biases as a white, middle-class female, in her 30s. It became increasingly evident in this process that I was a “researcher ‘in the middle’” (Breen, 2007). As an outsider, I was not currently working in the field of Academia, nor associated with the study site; however, prior to beginning the study I was employed at the campus that is used as the study site for this research and I am also a first-generation college student myself. It is important to note I was familiar with a handful of the faculty members I interviewed. Because of my history with the branch campus, many of the faculty appeared to be more likely to engage in a casual conversation, knowing that I could understand many of their experiences. An advantage to having this experience is my understanding of the campus culture and an ability to interact with the participants on a deeper level, all important characteristics of an “inside” researcher (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). Ultimately, as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I engaged in a series of self-assessments to ensure that my experiences were not impacting the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This was done by taking field notes and journaling throughout much of the process. Initially, the data was coded by hand; however, I eventually utilized NVIVO 12 to assist with data analysis.

Methods of Collecting Data

Institutional Review Board approval occurred prior to implementation of the study, which met the requirements for expedited review. Interview questions were created and discussed with my Dissertation Chair. The branch campus remained the sole interview site due to its accessibility, my existing rapport with some of the faculty members, and the first-generation student population that existed on campus.

Sampling and Contacting Potential Participants

At the time of the study, 18 faculty members taught at the study site during the 2016-2017 academic year and the goal was to obtain a minimum of 10 participants. A list of the current faculty members and their emails was found on the university's website. The initial email invitation included the Informed Consent and if a response was not received within 7 days, a follow-up email was sent. After an additional 7 days with no response, faculty members were then contacted by phone during their office hours. Those that responded in agreement to participate were contacted by email or phone to schedule an interview.

In total, eleven faculty members agreed to participate and were interviewed. Whether or not a faculty member participated was kept completely confidential and the sample only includes individuals over the age of 18 who taught at the branch campus, with no regard to gender or race. I conducted interviews at the main campus, branch campus, and a local coffee shop near the main campus, depending on the participants' preference. A copy of the interview guide was provided to participants a minimum of 1 week in advance of the scheduled interview, so they were aware of the questions and the subject matter that would be covered. This provided them with ample time to prepare, if they chose to do so. By distributing the interview questions in advance, participants were given the opportunity to think about their answers and provide more thoughtful, descriptive feedback, which may decrease anxiety since they know what is expected of them (Stanlick, S, 2010). On the other hand, responses may be more rehearsed and not as genuine. Ultimately, I decided it was advantageous to provide the

questions ahead of time. Prior to the interview, I emailed the consent form to participants and had a hard copy available at the interview.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview questions were used as the data collection method. By using this method, I hoped to obtain rich descriptions of faculty member's experiences teaching first-generation students (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The same questions were asked of all participants, except for additional probing or clarification questions. These types of questions were not part of the interview guide and were only used to gather more information based on respondent's answers. Much of the conversation remained open and faculty were free to share examples and stories of their experiences teaching first generation students. Ten of the interviews lasted 30-45 minutes, and one went well over an hour. All interviews were one-on-one. To establish trust and to build on the interviewing relationship, at the beginning of each interview I shared that my background did include teaching at that campus at one point in time (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

All interviews were recorded on a Sony digital recorder and I took brief notes throughout each interview, which summarized key concepts or specific language that I thought was important at that time. During the transcription process, I used pseudonyms in the place of names and all other identifying information was removed. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and all transcripts and notes were kept locked up or on a password protected computer.

At the end of each interview, participants were provided with my contact information and I invited them to send additional information (such as course syllabi and assignment examples) as it relates to the information discussed. None of the participants sent

follow-up information. Participants also were given the opportunity to receive the results of the study once the study was completed, and one participant did reach out inquiring about the progress and status of the study. No information will be withheld from the participants and a debriefing procedure is not necessary.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The following interview questions were developed based on the literature and research questions:

- 1.) How long have you been teaching at this campus? How often do you teach here?
- 2.) Tell me about your experiences teaching college students, at campuses other than this one? For example, when did you first teach a college class, how many campuses have you taught at, and what were those campuses like?

If not addressed in Question 2:

- 3.) What sort of experiences, if any, did you have teaching first-generation college students before you taught here?
- 4.) How would you describe your teaching style?
- 5.) What classroom practices do you believe are most effective in successfully reaching first-generation college students?
- 6.) Are there specific assignments/methods of assessment that you modified for first-generation college students?

6A.) Can you give me at least 2-3 specific examples?

- 7.) How do you know when the students are “getting it”?
- 8.) Where do you come up with ideas for teaching first-generation college students?
- 9.) How did you handle ‘misbehaviors’ in the classroom?

10.) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences teaching first-generation college students at this campus?

11.) Beyond what you have told me, if you think of any additional assignments that you have found especially helpful, please feel free to contact me.

Data Analysis

Using the phenomenological approach, I sought to understand how faculty made sense of their day-to-day life as a teacher. To do this, I had to set aside my prior experiences as an instructor at the study site and provide an objective analysis of the raw data. During the interviews I maintained analytic memos, such as when I shared a teaching experience with a participant, or when the participant mentioned remembering me as an instructor, which were reviewing upon analyzing the data.

First, I manually transcribed the interviews myself and then engaged in informal pre-coding by reviewing the data and highlighting or underlining any quotes or phrases that I found to be relevant and important, which also increased my familiarity with the data (Layder, 1998). After reviewing the data through transcription and pre-coding, I identified the broad themes that emerged, as they related to the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The themes were identified as first-generation student characteristics, instructor background, best practices, and campus climate. It's important to note that campus climate was not a concept specifically asked about in the interviews but was a common theme that consistently emerged in the conversations with participants.

Next, I uploaded the files of the transcribed interviews into NVIVO 12 Plus, a qualitative data analysis software program. I then created the four themes in the program and assigned a color to each, before beginning the coding process. Following that, I reviewed each

transcribed interview to determine relevant words and phrases, using a two-cycle coding process. The first cycle involved identifying key terms and phrases and assigning them an “initial code” or label. Initial coding is appropriate in this context because it provides a way to break down interview data and search for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2009). The second cycle was focusing coding, which meant searching for the most frequent and significant initial codes and grouping them into categories. With Nvivo, I then pulled up all of the initial codes to begin sorting and grouping. The initial codes were grouped into thirteen categories of meaning: Student Response to Homework, Online Access, Misbehaviors, Participation, Faculty Experience with First-Generation Students, Level of Preparation to Teach at Study Site, Teaching Style, Classroom Assignments, Classroom Policies, Process for Adaptations, Administrative and Academic Support, Physical Environment, Student Subculture. Nvivo not only allowed me to sort the codes into the categories but I could pull up categories to see the list of codes in each. Refer to Figure 6 and Figure 7 for the categories, codes, and sample responses.

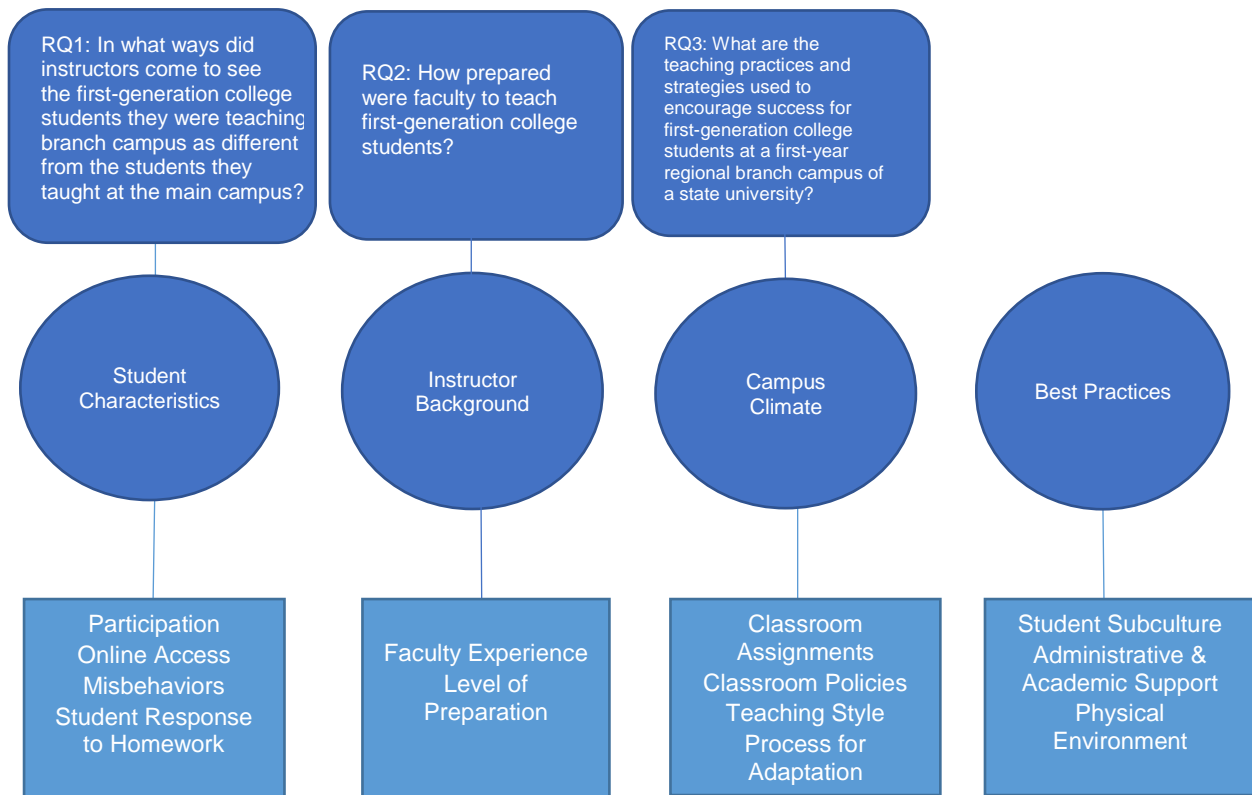


Figure 6. Codes and categories from the data

Categories of Meaning Labels	Theme	Sample Responses
Student Response Toward Homework	Student Characteristics	These students feel like the teacher is responsible to pass them. Someone will not do their homework but come to class and think it will work out because I'm nice.
Online Access	Student Characteristics	Students will admit they've never accessed D2L but offer no explanation why not.
Misbehaviors	Student Characteristics	There is a lot more talking and phone usage with these students.
Participation	Student Characteristics	The students are unpolished but actively and critically question things in a really good way.
Level of Preparation	Instructor Background	I was given a background and prepped that this would be a different teaching experience, but it was still much different than I ever imagined.
Faculty Experience	Instructor Background	I worked at 2 smaller liberal arts school that have a club for first-generation students. I did some mentoring of these students.
Teaching Style	Best Practices	It is very interactive. And I want to encourage students to care about one another as well.
Classroom Assignments	Best Practices	At the beginning of class, there's a list of questions that go along with my lecture. Through the course of the lecture, we stop and answer the questions together.
Classroom Policies	Best Practices	I take attendance more at this campus. I want to help them with structure and discipline since they are looking to move to another campus.
Process for Adaptations	Best Practices	I get material from professional development conferences and workshops.
Student Subculture	Campus Climate	They don't seem to have coping skills and that is unhealthy
Administrative and Academic Support	Campus Climate	I would send names of students to administration, but it seems like nothing was ever done.
Physical Environment	Campus Climate	These students don't have access to what other campuses have available, so I had to make modifications.

Figure 7. Thematic and coding structure.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) state that qualitative research can be valid and reliable when the study has credibility, dependability, and transferability. Below I summarize how the research includes those three factors, in order to best achieve accuracy.

Credibility

To ensure credibility of the findings, I was aware of my biases and took notes throughout the interview process of any assumptions or personal interests that arose. Participant stories were accurately represented using a recorder, so that the interviews could be transcribed word-for-word.

Dependability

In terms of dependability, an audit trail was kept in order to detail the process from the raw data, to journaling, and eventually coding and analysis. An audit trail is used to detail the flow, arguments, and the logic used throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

To achieve generalization, transferability is an issue that was addressed by providing enough information should the study be replicated. Background information on the purpose of the study, my personal interest in the topic, as well as the methodology, all contribute to transferability of the research.

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects and met the guidelines for expedited review. Research

subjects were not compensated, and all individuals were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw without penalty at any time. No participants withdrew from the study. This study did not involve vulnerable subjects and all the participants were over the age of 18.

It is a possibility that some faculty may have found the interview process itself uncomfortable and experience psychological strain, however there was no indication of this occurring throughout the process. If it had occurred, the interview would have immediately stopped. Benefits of participating in the interview process include increased self-awareness among faculty of their teaching, as well as an increased sense of pride that their work is being acknowledged. Confidentiality and anonymity was provided to all participants, as only the faculty names are known to the researcher. Identifying names and information are not included in any of the research that is presented to the public.

Chapter Summary

Out of 18 faculty members listed as instructors at the study site, 11 participated in the study. Participants received the Informed Consent and a copy of the questions to review prior to the interview. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, in addition to field notes taken throughout each conversation. The researcher transcribed the interviews and used NVIVO 12 software for data coding and analysis. Names and identifying information have been removed from the raw data and all information is stored in a locked box or password protected computer. Saldana's (2009) two-cycle coding was used to analyze the data. The initial codes were grouped into 12 categories of meaning and applied to one of four themes. Analytic memos include personal thoughts and notes that were deemed important throughout the process.

Issues of trustworthiness have been addressed by stating personal biases up front and ensuring that participant interviews were accurately represented. An audit trail was also maintained, and ample information on the study has been provided, for the purpose of replication. This study is considered low-risk to participants, however there is always the possibility of researcher bias and participant reactivity. This was controlled by addressing my personal history and background with the study site and it was noted that no subjects appeared to experience any strain or emotional stress during the interview process. Ultimately, this study will provide guidelines for effective teaching strategies for instructors who teach first-generation college student.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the analysis of the data and reports the findings generated by a qualitative analysis of the interviews of eleven faculty members who teach a predominantly first-generation student population. Interview questions focused on exploring faculty member experiences and assisted in answering the research questions for this study: *In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus? How prepared were faculty to teach first generation college students? What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?*

Demographics

Of the eleven participants interviewed for the study, seven were female and four were male. At the time of the study, the educational background and experience of the eleven participants interviewed for the study (as seen in Figure 8) can be broken down as follows: Eight were currently only teaching at the study site, while three also taught at the main campus of the university. With respect to teaching experience, just over half of the participants had 10+ years of teaching experience and four had less than two years. Of the 11 study participants, five taught at the study site for less than two years, with the remaining having taught more than two years there. The university positions held by study participants include three Associate Professors, four Assistant Professors, three Adjunct faculty, and one has an administrative position in addition to teaching duties.

Background Information	Sample = 11 participants	
Current Teaching Location	Study Site only	8
	Study Site and Other Campus	3
Years of Teaching Experience	10+ years	6
	5 -10 years	1
	Less than 2 years	4
Years Teaching at the Study Site	Less than 2 years	5
	More than 2 years	6
Title	Associate Professor	3
	Assistant Professor	4
	Adjunct/Lecturer	3
	Administrator/Instructor	1

Figure 8. Educational background of participants.

First-Generation Student Characteristics

First generation students are often defined by their lack of knowledge and experience prior to entering college, because of the unfamiliarity with higher education that these students have (Hsiao, 1992). The following themes: Response to Homework, Online Access, Misbehaviors, and Participation, were developed from the inductive coding process. These themes answered the following research question: *In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus?* The differences in attitudes and behaviors within the classroom may be difficult for some instructors, which is evident by one participant's statement:

These students feel like the teacher is responsible to pass them. Like it is not up to them, whether they succeed or not.

This participant then went on to say:

It's almost like the syllabus doesn't mean anything. It doesn't determine their fate.

They think "If you like me, you will pass me".

First-generation students often arrive to college unprepared and lacking any expectations of what it means to be a college student, but many can adapt through the norming process that takes place on campus and in classrooms (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). The norming process involves individuals in a group adhering to the rules of an environment and gaining a better understanding of how things work. According to several of the participants, this does not happen at the branch campus, as one instructor stated:

I usually rely on others in the class to do things, to help norm the classroom behaviors, but I don't have that at this campus. It is up to me and that makes being a professor difficult.

Students at this branch campus miss out on the norming process that typically occurs, particularly for those students who attend the main campus or another university with students of traditional backgrounds.

Several of the participants in this study teach at both the study site and the larger main campus and noticed quite a few differences, as they discussed in the interviews:

At the other campus the students just know what to do. These students don't.

I noticed at this campus, more so than others I teach at, that these students don't understand basic etiquette. I had to guide them on everything from arriving to class, to picking up their papers, to taking notes during a lecture. I couldn't assume anything.

A lot of my students at the other campus have laptops and just know how to take notes. At this campus, maybe three to four will take notes. The rest are having side conversations, zoning out, playing on their phones.

Some of the more experienced faculty members (those with five or more years of teaching experience) provided insight into what they found to be true with this student population and used that to guide their teaching style:

First gen students have insecurities. They know they are at a disadvantage, so I work on developing their confidence and letting them know that a college degree is really within their reach. We don't want students to feel like they are on the outside looking in. They are a part of the community and not just individuals who don't matter.

Another experienced instructor also understands the background of first-generation students:

I feel like every student at this campus is capable but there are other things in the way. It's not a lack of intelligence or ability, but life gets in the way. They aren't unmotivated, but their priorities tend to be different. Home or family takes priority over school. They also tend to have different coping skills than the typical college student.

Two other participants shared statements about first-generation students and jumping to conclusions about their ability to learn and succeed:

First gen students don't know what they don't know. We take for granted their knowledge level – so I am mindful and deliberate in my wording. Patience is important!

Don't assume they're stupid but take time to explain. How we perceive them can come across in the classroom, so be careful!

One instructor gave a description of a common issue they encounter, in the difference between the two campuses:

At the other campus, students offer information throughout the class, almost like they are trying to teach me or the rest of the class. I don't see that here. I also struggle with getting first-generation students to make connections between material we have learned throughout the material. It's like once a class ends, they think that material ends, and we will never come back to it.

The following sections go on to discuss challenges in the classroom including homework and accessing class resources, misbehaviors, and participation.

Student Response to Homework

As stated in Chapter 2, a students' background is a major factor impacting success in higher education, particularly their high school experience and family background (Pike and Saupe, 2002). Not only do first-generation students not take advanced courses that will prepare them for college, but they tend to come from families who are less involved in academics (Lareau, 2003). First-generation students tend to have difficulty taking ownership of their own education, which one instructor talked about in their interview:

When students at other campuses don't do homework, they aren't surprised if they get a poor grade. These students feel like the teacher is responsible to pass them. Someone will not do their homework but come to class and think it will work out because I'm nice.

They went on to note that this seems to reflect their high school experience; no matter what the student did, they passed their class and graduated. One participant touched on social promotion:

Students don't realize they won't pass just by attending class, like they did in high school. Homework is part of the grade. I tell them they can attend my class every day and still fail.

And another reported a similar sentiment in their interview:

I want them to understand that this material will help prepare them for the class. Class is not a stand-in for reading. There is work that must occur outside of the classroom.

Many of the faculty also discussed students' lack of responsibility. According to one faculty member:

I feel like I make every effort to ensure they know about assignments and deadlines and information. I mention it in class, in D2L, and in the syllabus. I still get students that say they didn't know.

As you can see from the remarks, not only do the students come to class academically unprepared, but they miss out on the norming process that occurs at other campuses and universities. Because of these, they may have trouble adapting to the campus culture, and it becomes the responsibility of instructors to prepare the students for what occurs beyond the classroom.

Online Access

With the widespread use of technology in classrooms, we must be sure students are not being left behind. A few faculty members stated that D2L (Desire2Learn), an

online learning management system, was a standard part of many classes at the university and while they incorporated it into their classes with first-generation students, many did not access it. As one participant declared:

I found that students will admit that they've never accessed D2L but offer no explanation as to why not.

Other participants shared similar experiences of students not accessing D2L and never finding out why.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this is not only that students are not utilizing the online learning tool and or providing explanations as to why they aren't, but that they aren't seeking help from their professor. That means, students are missing all the content and information that is in the online learning system. One instructor even went out of their way to accommodate students who had trouble accessing their textbook:

The students in my class thought the textbook was too expensive, so they negotiated with me. They asked me to put the chapters online, so I put them on D2L. After 2 weeks, pretty much no one accessed D2L, whereas students at the other campus access it regularly.

Distinctions between the study site and other campuses were common, as you will read below. In this case, students at a larger traditional campus within the same university system accessed D2L on a regular basis, as they were told to do so. Whereas, the first-generation student population at the study site did not access it, even after requesting that the instructor use it in place of a textbook. As another participant explained:

They're enamored with electronics but won't use D2L or online class resources. There's a noticeable difference at this campus, from the other one I teach at.

The faculty member went on to describe how the students were asked if they want electronic or print versions of their textbooks. Much to the participant's surprise, the first-generation students at the study site wanted to use hard copies of the textbook. Several participants noted that using D2L and other online resources at the larger campus is a reality that students cannot avoid, because so many classes require them. That is not the case at this branch campus.

Misbehaviors

Many faculty members shared their experiences of unacceptable student behavior. For faculty who teach at multiple campuses, the difference in the classroom culture was evident, as one instructor shared:

There is a lot more talking and phone usage with these students, compared to the other campus. On the first day, paper snowballs were being thrown around the class.

Another participant shared a bit about their experience with students talking during a lecture:

The talking amongst themselves used to offend me and I would take it personally. One time I yelled at the students in class. I'm mortified I did that.

They also noticed a difference as compared to the other campus:

I don't see this chattiness with students at the other campus. It's like those students at the main campus just know what to do and these students don't.

The importance of capital has been discussed and its' impact was made clear throughout these interviews. Since these students arrive to a college campus lacking cultural capital, they are placed at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the

norming that occurs in a college classroom (Hennessy-Himmelheber, 2015). As noted above, this could be the reason why students “don’t know what to do.” As one faculty member pointed out:

It usually isn’t until they attend college that they learn what is appropriate and what isn’t.

Participation

The faculty interviewed had varying degrees of success when it came to overall attendance and student participation during class. There were no patterns based on faculty experience, or whether there were attendance and participation policies in place (such as not being allowed to make up work for missing class). However, the instructor’s personality seemed to play a role in participation. Faculty who were more outgoing, used humor, and took a much livelier approach to teaching, seemed to have better success with attendance and participation. A range of experiences was shared by those interviewed:

Participation at this campus is great. There is an enthusiasm for learning that you don’t always see at other campuses. The students are unpolished but actively and critically question things in a really good way.

Another instructor has similar experiences:

I have a lively class, so much so that I need to calm them down.

Both faculty members expressed a need to redirect the enthusiasm to an appropriate level for a college classroom. For some, attendance is an ongoing issue:

I used to have a critical thinking activity in every class at the end but I moved it to the beginning because so many were late. Now some are mostly on-time

because they aren't allowed to complete assignment if they aren't there, but I still have ones that don't seem to care.

Adjustments throughout the semester to increase participation was a priority for one instructor:

I struggle with interaction during lecture. They don't answer my questions. Now I do my bit of content delivery and let them try it, and then I can get conversation going. I walk around to groups and work with each of them.

One instructor found that approximately 1/3 of their class actively participates. Even when participation points were offered, there was not an increase in student participation. Another faculty member tried group work to improve participation:

There is little participation at this campus because they are just not interested in being involved in the class. I don't even get a response when I ask questions like "do you watch TV". I have started to try collaborative learning by giving them print-outs of slides and dividing them into groups based on different topics that they must teach each other. This seems to be working now.

They also pointed out a difference from the other campus they teach at:

There is a lack of enthusiasm for attending class, which is much different than at the other campus. These students always want to know if things are for a grade or for a bonus. They don't want to learn for the sake of learning. One time I asked them to send me a picture that brings out an emotion in them. At the other campus, I had emails right after class and most of the class participated. At this campus they wanted to know if it was for a bonus. When I told them it wasn't, I ended up with only three students sending a picture.

The personal characteristics of the instructor can play a huge part in how students respond in the class. Much of the research pointed to enthusiasm in the classroom as an important factor for instructors to possess (Yoon, 2002; Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, and Reif, 1987; Oesch, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995), and this was certainly clear from the responses above, as newer faculty may still be working on their confidence and becoming more comfortable in the classroom. Effective teaching strategies, according to the participants in the study, will be addressed later in the chapter.

Instructor Background

The characteristics of first-generation students are important to acknowledge, but this study is interested in faculty and their experiences with these students, particularly their background and level of preparation, which address the second research question; *How prepared were faculty to teaching first-generation college students?*

The background of the instructors interviewed can be separated into two categories: Prior experience with first-generation students and the preparation instructors received to teach at the study site. Participants were probed to discuss what past experiences they've had with this student population, as well as any prior knowledge of first-generation students. Additionally, because the study site is such a unique campus, instructors often commented on the level of preparation they received to teach at the branch campus.

Experience with First-Generation Students

All participants were asked to talk about their college teaching experience, including length of time they have been teaching and the campuses where they have

taught. If it was not brought up, they were specifically prompted to describe their experience with first-generation college students, if any. Out of the 11 participants interviewed, six taught or interacted with first-generation students at some point in their teaching career, beyond this past year. As one participant pointed out:

I may not have taught first-generation students at other campuses, but I have been here for 20 years and teach at three of the campuses, with most of my students being first-generation.

Another had a similar experience teaching for a length of time within this university and its associated campuses:

I started at the main university as an adjunct 10 years ago and that grew into a full-time position, teaching there and at another branch campus. Years later I was eventually asked to teach at this campus (the study site).

Some of the instructors have experience with the first-generation student population, but in a different role:

I worked at 2 smaller liberal arts school that have a club for first-generation students. I did some mentoring of these students.

Before coming here, I taught at a similar campus but in the adult education program. The students were a bit older, but many were the first in their family to receive a college education and faced similar obstacles as what I see here.

Another worked with these students in an administrator capacity:

I used to be an administrator where I interacted with first-generation students but eventually came back to teaching, so I have perspective from both roles. The challenges are certainly present in both roles.

The participants who did not have experience with first-generation students had varying backgrounds. Two taught in the K-12 system, while another developed and implemented training courses overseas. Others mentioned that while they do not have teaching experience with this student population, they do have the educational background in teaching methods that they believe helps them manage their classroom.

Throughout the discussion of each instructor's background, the conversation moved toward the type of preparation each instructor received prior to teaching at the branch campus, as well as how their teaching style has changed to best meet the needs of this population.

Preparation Provided to Teach at Study Site

Each of the participants discussed their preparedness and level of readiness to teach at the study site. Four of the participants stated they taught at the branch campus for so long, they don't remember what type of training or preparation they received specifically for this site. However, several did mention that they have seen many instructors come and go and the lack of preparation was "not fair" to new faculty coming to this branch campus to teach:

On many occasions, I have heard new faculty say they do not feel like they are prepared or trained to teach here.

It's unfair to send new faculty members here. Particularly because of student evaluations. This is a hard campus, so your evaluations are based on student perceptions, not if students learned anything. These students don't value the teacher that challenges them and encourages them to think and work through it.

Out of the remaining participants, four admitted to receiving some type of background information and training. Some even visited the branch campus and talked with those currently there, so they would have a better idea of what to expect:

The Dean of the campus met with me before I started teaching there and gave me a good review of what to expect. That was helpful.

Before I started at this campus they had me shadow an instructor and that was so helpful!

Another participant also met with the Dean prior to the start of their first semester teaching. The Dean let this faculty member know that the pace of the course may differ, there may be more disruptions, and the skills and abilities of the students are different than what you see at the main campus. The instructors stated that by having this information prior to teaching, they were able to go into the semester with a different set of expectations and had already adjusted assignments.

Similarly, another instructor received background information on the branch campus, though it was from their Department. They thought they were prepared for the experience but still found it was much different than they imagined:

My Department talked to me about the students at this campus and how I may be presented with more challenges than I typically see. I thought I was prepared but I was completely caught off-guard with the level of disruptions and immaturity I saw from the students.

The remaining three instructors received no information prior to teaching, with one stating that they were merely told that it is a satellite campus where students transfer to the main campus. While experience with a first-generation student population does not

guarantee success in the classroom, several of the participants agreed that it does seem to be beneficial to receive some type of preparation and first-hand “training” (shadowing, meeting with Dean) prior to their first class.

Best Practices

In Chapter 2, I discussed some of the key traits in faculty that were found to impact student success. In addition to enthusiasm, student motivation and success could be attributed to faculty who are encouraging and have compassion for the challenges that first-generation students present with in the classroom (Hao, 2001). In addition to the understanding the traits of faculty, I am interested in the classroom practices that participants found to be most effective when teaching first-generation students, especially specific assignments and policies. Participants were also asked to discuss how they adapted their teaching to this population, if they did at all. This section addresses the third research question; *What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?*

Teaching Style

When the participants were asked to describe their teaching style, a collaborative and facilitative approach was predominant among the faculty, with many encouraging students to be active participants in their education. A few common keywords came up in the conversations, “interactive”, “facilitate”, and “support”, as seen in the statements from faculty below:

My teaching style is much more interactive that it has ever been, now that I primarily teach here.

I'm very interactive. I want students to know the material connects to their lives.

I perceive my role as a facilitator, instead of a lecturer. I like group discussions and project-based learning.

The best teachers in the world are the best coaches – support your students and have respect for them.

I facilitate instead of lecture. After going over the readings, I try to apply a real-life connection.

Several instructors utilize a “hands-on” approach in the classroom:

I try to give a hands-on experience that they truly can experience. That seems to click with myself and the students. I found it much better than the standard lecture approach.

Another instructor agrees:

I like to model things for them. I don't just teach but I show. For example, I'll bring Play Doh and use that during class.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, three of the participants took a more directive approach with first-generation students and wanted them to understand the serious nature of college and the responsibility they have as a college student.

I try not to be boring, but I do like to have control in the classroom. I find that minimal discussion works best. The less open and unstructured discussion there is, the better. There were way too many wrong answers being put out in the class discussions and sometimes that's what students took with them.

On the first days of the semester, I lay down the law and try to be a bit more serious, so they know up front what I expect.

It's a fine line. I make students responsible for their learning and grade, it shouldn't be the professor. I am not going to work harder than the student. One instructor who was new to teaching last year shared that they often took the blame when students didn't succeed. After a year of teaching though, they found that the students came to college lacking an understanding that their grade and success in college was their responsibility, not the professor's.

To help students in the transition from high school to college, the instructors interviewed noted that making personal connections with the students contributed to a positive relationship, which encouraged students to reach out when they needed help. As one participant put it:

I want the students to feel comfortable coming to me if they need help, but they will only do that if I can make that connection with them in the classroom.

Another responded in agreement:

Teachers must make a personal connection. Students need to know you're on their side. I want them to know the Department cares about them.

Just over half of the faculty interviewed had prior experience with first-generation students. According to one participant, their experiences with this population encouraged them to change their teaching style from one that is predominantly lecture, to a more interactive and developmental approach.

I used to lecture a lot but now that I have several years of experience with these students, I've found that an interactive approach seems to be more effective. I have seen success in terms of better attendance and increased participation in the classroom.

One of the participants, who has taught first-generation students at other campuses, believes that that experience has given them a better understanding of the population, which has only helped them in the classroom.

I've adjusted my assignments by creating more review sheets to assist students in their learning. Many of these students are not skilled at studying, so we practice that in the classroom.

Interestingly, the two participants with a background in K-12 teaching found that those experiences helped them with college students:

After a few weeks, I decided to use my "goofiness" from teaching middle-school students to try get these students involved and it worked!

After some difficulties at the start of the semester, I looked back to my days teaching high school and used some of those same techniques. I let my personality come through and focused on keeping them entertained and intrigued by the content, which I found to be successful.

I have had to modify my assignments for the students here. At the other campus the students will know what I mean and figure it out. Here, I must be very clear and intentional because they won't ask for clarification. I have very little freedom.

These students here seem to struggle with reading, so I put everything on a Power Point, even though it's a lot of words. But I let them copy the notes directly from the slides, so they are writing it down and listening to me say it. At the other campus, the students can take notes from listening to a lecture, without needing the slides.

The pace at this campus is slower. I now allow more time to cover material.

There was one participant who did not adjust their teaching and assignments for the students at the study site and believed that it was a disservice to the students since they would need to learn the material before transferring to another campus. However, most found that making simple changes to the activity, or creating new assignments all together, was a beneficial practice that best met the needs of the students. There was no predominant teaching style that was evident among the 11 participants, though the majority (8) took a more interactive approach to teaching by utilizing discussions, group work, and hands-on activities, as opposed to lecture

Classroom Assignments

When asked what assignments were most successful for the students at this branch campus, the participants had no problem coming up with several examples of things that worked for them. As you will see in the list below, many are “hands-on” and include a level of participation and interaction during class. Group work was a common component of these assignments:

When I do the collaborative group work, I assign speakers from each group to be the speaker. This forces everyone to try to learn the material. I follow-up with questions and try to get each student involved. I don't like to put too much pressure on students, so I will allow group members to answer follow-up questions.

I vary activities and do a lot of group work. I typically have extra credit points involved and never have them spend more than 15 minutes in groups. This seems to be going well so far.

I pose questions to the class and have them get in groups to come up with a

common answer. We do a lot of Think Pink Share.

There is usually a lot of activity and engagement in my class. Not much lecture and a lot of group work. I usually have them apply material to their personal lives and try to learn about themselves in the process.

At the beginning of class I hand out a list of questions that go along with my lecture, most are critical thinking in nature. During the lecture we stop and answer the questions, and then they have a small group discussion. I've been doing this for years and it is the most effective way to get through the lessons.

While many found group work to be an effective strategy for learning, a few instructors were not convinced:

The students like to work in groups, but I don't know that that is the best way to learn. They do engage and interact when working with each other, but I haven't found that they learn the material when doing this.

And others found that it depends on the class:

I do group assignments regularly. Sometimes it works beautifully, other times it doesn't. It really depends on the personality of the students in the class.

I assign the students into groups. They are to do four questions individually, and then they do group questions and combine their answers. But some classes seem to get very confused by the process. Sometimes the groups flounder or 1 person does all the work and students end up getting angry.

Several participants are mindful of what they call their assignments:

I do a lab assignment for every unit. I found that students responded better to the assignments being called "labs". The students would write about a certain part

of their life and then connect it to what we were talking about. They seemed to enjoy this, and it helped them to learn the content.

I don't call it "homework" I call it "preparatory activities" because homework gets such a bad name. I want them to understand that this material will help prepare them for the class. Class is not a stand-in for reading.

Another popular class assignment used by many of the instructors was to provide students with worksheets that they used throughout the class as a guide:

Each class I hand out a wellness worksheet. It is a checklist of items that they check off what applies to them. It varies with each topic but always ties together the material we are covering and their personal life.

I have them use notecards during class and worksheets to review class material at the end of each class. This gives them something to take home and reinforces what we covered.

I use worksheets even more now than when I first started teaching. It helps students focus and sharpen their note taking skills.

According to Angelo and Cross (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1995), timely and supportive feedback was identified as a trait of a good teacher. Two of the instructors in the study mentioned feedback as a component of their teaching strategy:

Every class I get something from them and I make sure to grade and return it by the next class. I want them to receive immediate feedback on their performance, so they know where they stand.

My assignments change depending on the students and the class material, but I always have them do something that gets graded, and I return it immediately. I

want them to see the consequences of the behavior (studying or not studying) and provide them with time to change it if needed.

Exams were a part of most of the classes that participants taught, and a few commented on how they use tests to help students learn the material in the most effective way possible:

My exams are not memorizing content. It's a lot of application and critical thinking, so it takes a while before they get used to it. But once they know what to expect, the average exam grade seems to go up by the end of the semester.

Students think I will tell them what they need to know. They don't believe me when I tell them that we won't cover everything in class, some of the things they will need to review and learn on their own time. Some never get it, but the ones that do will be prepared for when they transition to the other campus.

I tell the students that the prep activities we do in class will be on the exam, so there should be no reason anyone fails an exam. But I still get several students that don't pay attention, don't do the activities during class, and then get upset with me with then fail. I view tests as a way to bring together the material we have learned to date. I give them ample opportunity to practice during class with the prep activities. Those that fail, it is usually because they aren't listening or paying attention, not because they don't understand the material or are having trouble learning.

One instructor does not give exams in their class but has multiple writing assignments. A struggle of another participant has been getting students to put in more effort and go beyond the minimum requirements. They gave an example of when they first started

teaching hand they gave the students a writing assignment with a minimum length requirement. From their prior experiences teaching at other campuses, most students surpassed the minimum required length. If the directions stated that the assignment should be 250 words, most students turned in more than that. However, when the first-generation students at the study site were given an assignment with a 250-minimum word requirement, many will turn in 245 words or less. And the students would get upset if they were deducted points for not meeting the minimum length.

While some students will go above and beyond, the experiences from the participants in the study is that the first-generation students at this study site will typically do the minimum required, if that. It was also evident that students will not ask for clarification if they don't understand something, so clarity on the part of the faculty member is important. There is little room to experiment with assignments when teaching first-generation students.

Classroom Policies

In addition to successful assignments, participants also described the classroom policies they implemented. Many of the policies had to do with increasing attendance and participation, when they didn't have one to begin with. As noted by many of the faculty interviewed, attendance seemed to be one of the top things that first-generation students struggled with. As one instructor who taught at multiple campuses stated:

I teach here and at the main campus and I didn't have to implement an attendance policy until I started teaching at this campus. Attendance is much lower here, which is ironic because most live in the dorms just a few feet away.

Another instructor was also surprised at the attendance issue, since most of the students do not commute:

I will drive from Pittsburgh in a snow storm and half my class doesn't show, even though they just have to walk next door! I now have an attendance policy with allowable absences and then a point deduction for each class missed after that. The students don't seem to grasp that. They hold on to a high school understanding of absences.

One participant believed that these students aren't equipped to think through the long-term consequences. For example, they know they already missed their 2 "allowable" classes and if they miss anymore they will lose points, but they don't feel like going today so they won't go. Another instructor uses their attendance policy to teach structure and discipline. They view it as part of the hidden curriculum of college, that so many first-generation students struggle with.

There are a few instructors who don't have an attendance policy but instead, they use class assignments to reward those who attend:

Every day I get something from them, whether it is collecting homeworking, or a quiz or activity at the start of class. If they aren't there, they get a 0 for it, though I do drop the lowest score. No exceptions. This is a different way of helping students to see the importance of attending class.

Out of the 11 faculty members that were interviewed for the study, eight of them believed attendance to be an issue in their class. The three instructors who did not have to implement an attendance or related policy were all experienced instructors with 10+ years of teaching experience and had been teaching at the study site longer than the

other participants. One of them found that the distance from the class to the residence halls where most of the students lived, had a positive impact on attendance (contrary to what other instructors found):

Participation and attendance is pretty good. They do live here and only need to walk across the sidewalk, so it's easy to attend. Also, it's a small campus so even if they do miss class, I usually end up seeing them somewhere. There's an accountability factor that you don't have on larger campuses.

Attendance wasn't the only issue that was brought up. One instructor had a big issue with students being late:

At the other campus, most students are in class by 1:50 for a 2:00 class. At this campus, 50% of the class is late and I still have people casually walking in 10 minutes after class began, without being apologetic. I stress the importance of being on time, especially since it's a 50-minute class, but I haven't found anything that has worked.

It was discovered that those instructors who struggle with students not attending or arriving late, tended to be newer faculty members with less teaching experience.

When the faculty participating in this interview were asked how they handled misbehaviors in the classroom, the findings ranged from calling the students out immediately, to ignoring them and moving on with the lecture. It was found that all the faculty who took a more passive approach to inappropriate behaviors (did not address the situation or ignored the problem.) were instructors with two years or less of teaching experience. When prompted for examples of effective classroom management, the more seasoned faculty used the following techniques to address classroom issues: here

I walk around often and ask students specifically to put phones away. We talk about the reason for not using phones. I'm very research based. I tell them why they shouldn't have them out and why multi-tasking in the classroom isn't a good idea. I think they get it. I'm not a big enforcer or dictator about it.

Bribery works! I give 1 credit point if they turn phones in at beginning of class and they do it! I don't have a phone problem anymore. I tried everything, and this is the only thing that worked.

I have set rules for coming in late, leaving early, changing seats, eye rolling, and heavy sighing. I will kick out students. I have a box for phones. There is no conversation about it. If you're on your phone, it goes in the box.

I address student issues at that time in class. I tell them to visit me or fix their issues immediately because I cannot help them at the end of the semester.

When those instructors with less than 2 years of experience were asked about their classroom management policies, they took a more passive approach as you can see in their responses below:

I try to extinguish the behavior by ignoring it. For the times that doesn't work, I do ask them to stop and let them know it's disruptive.

I don't want to embarrass students. If they are talking or on their phone, I simply ask if they have questions about the material. Usually they say "no" and we move on.

My classes are very interactive, so that alone reduces misbehaviors. When I see something, I try to be passive and just give a look or walk around. If it continues, I stop talking and wait. There are times that I must ask students to

leave the class or to change seats, but that is rare. I don't like taking it that far. The faculty with more experience expressed a confidence in "leading" the classroom that the newer faculty did not. This was also evident when looking at the level of student attendance and participation in the classroom, as discussed in the next section.

Process for Adaptations

Following the discussion of teaching style, classroom policies and assignments, participants were asked where they came up with ideas for teaching first-generation college students. Since most of the instructors that were interviewed acknowledged that adjustments were made to their teaching, one of the interview questions asked participants, "Where do you come up with ideas for teaching first-generation college students?"

Two of the participants have a background in K-12 teaching and used those experiences to make adaptations that better fit first-generation students. One of the participants said:

I come with up ideas to teach by looking back at my days teaching high school and my educational background. That is often the same technique I use with the first-generation students but students that I teach at other campuses that have a traditional background.

Four participants got ideas from colleagues at their university, or at professional development conferences and workshops. Those ideas didn't necessarily come from those within the same field. Two instructors have an educational background in teaching methodologies, which helped in coming up with practices and policies, and two others researched literature, best practices and utilized blogs, to pull together classroom

material. Two instructors admitted that when they try new activities and ways of teaching, it is a matter of trial and error until they find something that works:

Some assignments are trial and error. I often find what may work in one class
`doesn't always work in the next.

Lastly, one instructor referred to the notion that students know themselves best and can likely provide some ideas and alternatives to classroom activities that you may not have thought of, stated:

Ask the students! They know they're language!

Out of the eleven instructors interviewed for the study, all but one made adjustments to their classroom practices when teaching first-generation students.

Overall, a large majority of the instructors (8) used their educational background in teaching methods, as well as their experience teaching outside of higher education, to come up with alternative practices. A couple of the participants researched literature and blogs, with one participant admitting it was a matter of trial and error before coming up with the practices that fit, and another exclaiming that student input into the classroom structure is beneficial.

Campus Climate

While not a part of the interview questions, several themes on campus culture came up through inductive coding. Topics include academic and administrative support, student culture, and the physical environment.

Administrative & Academic Support

One topic that came up in many of the interviews was the level of involvement from administration at the branch campus. The instructors pointed out that having the

support of administrators was crucial, particularly when student intervention was needed. Some of the participants talked about a program the branch campus had a few years ago that brought together faculty and staff regularly throughout the semester to come up with intervention strategies for those students who were beginning to fall behind. The faculty and staff team met several times a month to identify students who could use additional support and resources. Together, they developed an individualized plan to meet the needs of each student and an action plan was put in to place, with follow-up occurring at the next meeting. Those involved found the program beneficial and thought it was a proactive way to reach students before they fell too far behind.

One of the initiatives that came out of the program was a student recognition program, which recognizes students who are excelling inside and outside of the classroom. One instructor pointed out that students were proud when they received the honor and it encouraged them to continue their success inside and outside of the classroom:

The ones who flourish at this campus are the ones who embrace being embraced. Acknowledging accomplishments (no matter how small) is important for first-generation students. Getting reward and recognition seems to work great with that population and yield positive results.

Recognizing students at the branch campus was particularly beneficial for first-generation students who tend to get lost at larger campuses. As another instructor stated:

You can really tell them the students embrace the recognition. For most of these students, it's the first time they are being honored.

At the time of this study, the faculty-staff team was no longer in existence, though none of the participants were sure why. Faculty who were involved in the team, had this to say about it:

We are missing that relationship with the administration, which is so important on a campus this small. The program helped to develop that relationship.

When I couldn't address a student issue myself, it was encouraging to know that I had a team of supporters (fellow faculty and staff) to help me through the situation.

I have seen first-hand students flourish because of the intervention program. We were able to reach the students before it was too late.

The program helped students to see that we (faculty and administrators) work together and we're on their side. Success must occur in the classroom, as well as outside of it, and the intervention program helped us all to stay on the same page.

A few instructors remarked about not having the administrative support they once had:

I've had students who never came to class, but they never dropped. I would send names of students to administrators, but it never seemed like anything was being done. It was discouraging.

I don't ever hear much from the administration side of things. It's like, I do my own thing in the classroom and they do their thing in their offices. There is a separation and there shouldn't be. The students need all of us to work together.

Overwhelmingly, the participants who have been around for several years missed the

administrative support they once had. Each one of them noted that the benefits to the students was positive.

Physical Environment

The study site was chosen because of its' predominant first-generation student population and small size. This presented an opportunity to explore the experiences of faculty and gain an understanding of their most effective teaching strategies. While much of my conversations with faculty focused on characteristics of the students or instructors themselves, several of the participants discussed the physical environment of the branch campus and the obstacles that forced faculty to adjust their assignments or teaching strategy. As an example, one instructor said the following:

One assignment I have for students at both campuses I teach at is to engage in a physical activity at the gym or a class. I didn't realize until I started teaching here that these students don't have access to what students at the other campus have, so I had to make modifications.

Another faculty member made note of the structure of the branch campus environment:

Because the campus is so small, the students moves to each class in groups, often having the same classmates in each class. Everything is scripted and too structured, almost like high school.

As a former instructor at the branch campus, I have heard many of the students in my classes remark:

The same students are in all my classes.

There is nothing to do here.

We don't feel welcome in this town.

I have observed the climate and environment and agree that it does pose some barriers to students broadening their experiences. The entire campus is situated on a very small lot and all the classrooms are within one building and the residence halls are just steps away. The branch campus is also situated in a small neighborhood that does not have a lot of things for the students to do within walking distance. During my time there, there was an opportunity for students to take a bus to the main campus for sporting events and other activities, particularly on the weekends.

Student Subculture

The subculture of the students at the branch campus was pointed out by several participants:

They don't seem to have coping skills and that is unhealthy. They need to learn how to deal with difficult situations or hard assignments.

Throughout much of the chapter, numerous examples of the unique characteristics of the student subculture that exists at this branch campus being studied, have been described. Earlier in the chapter, participants described a culture of students not completing homework or assignments yet expecting to get a passing grade because the faculty member was "nice". There was also the ongoing issue of students not accessing the online learning system despite repeated efforts from faculty, and the ongoing issue of late arrivals to class and other participation and attendance problems, particularly among newer faculty members. Much of this culture exists because of the small size and unique background of first-generation students, and their lack of exposure to the traditional college experience that can be found at larger universities.

Chapter Summary

First-generation students bring a range of unique traits and characteristics to the classroom. One of the biggest obstacles shared by many of the participants is that these students lack the background to understand the norms and expectations of what occurs in a college classroom (Hicks, 2006). Much of what many instructors assume students should know, these students don't. This is evident in the policies and practices that the participants have had to implement, particularly after they gained experience with these students.

This chapter presented the findings from the 11 interviews, as they answered the research questions established for the study: *In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus? How prepared were faculty to teach first generation college students? What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?* Each of the themes that emerged was presented, along with a discussion of the participant's responses. In Chapter 5, I will continue the discussion on the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exploratory study is to assess the ways in which instructors teaching first-generation college students at a branch campus come to understand these students as being different from other students they teach, and if and how they develop teaching practices and pedagogies more effective for first-generation students. The following research questions guided the study: *In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus? How prepared were faculty to teach first generation college students? What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?* To understand the experiences of faculty members and to best answer the research questions, 11 faculty members who teach a predominantly first-generation student population at a branch campus of a public university were interviewed. Interview questions focused on exploring faculty member experiences and assisted in answering the research questions for this study. This chapter brings together the data from the interviews and pedagogical theories to further interpret the findings and discuss the implications for policy and practice. This chapter concludes by identifying the limitations of the study and providing directions for future research and a conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of Findings

In the discussion below, I will relate the findings from the interviews to the factors affecting student retention and the impact of capital on first-generation students. Using

andragogy and critical pedagogy as a guide, I will explore how the teaching practices that came out of the interviews can assist in removing the retention barriers that first-generation students face. Additionally, since many first-generation students attend college with limited capital, I will discuss the successful strategies that will help instructors provide students with opportunities to increase their capital, ultimately leading to success in the classroom and improved retention.

Using Pedagogy to Remove Retention Barriers

First-generation students are attending college at increasing rates, causing many instructors to have to adjust their teaching strategies to meet the changing population in their classrooms (Betances, 2006). The importance of identifying effective strategies is because these students only have a 27% chance of graduating within four years, as compared to 39% for the traditional student population (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, Tran, 2011). The findings of the studies have been applied to each of the factors affecting student retention, as they were discussed in the literature review, and andragogy and critical pedagogy are then used to determine the best ways to address each factor. This discussion will not only help instructors with guidelines for setting first-generation students up for success in the classroom but contribute to increasing retention in colleges and universities among this student population.

Student Background and Pedagogy. The background factor affecting student retention involves the educational background of parents, limited support when attending college, and a lack of college preparation throughout high school. The impact of family and capital will be discussed in a later section, when I make the connection to the role of faculty as bridging the gap for first-generation students to succeed. However,

college readiness was a factor brought up in much of the interviews, as faculty found it obvious that first-generation students do not have an adequate understanding of the college student role. One of the instructors mentioned that the students feel like their success is in the hands of the teacher. Others felt similarly, remarking that students believed that if an instructor “seemed nice” they would pass students. Much of this can be attributed to students not knowing what to expect, due to the limited education of their parents. Also, as it was stated in the literature review, first-generation students typically do not enroll in advanced or college prep classes in high school (Bui, 2002). This was also evident in the conversations with faculty who stated they had to adjust their material to add more clarity use and moved through the content at a slower pace. Ultimately, since the study site is predominantly first-year students, this is the first exposure they have of college; therefore, faculty have the responsibility to appropriately socialize them to higher education.

Using the standard of self-concept from Andragogy and drawing on life experiences as stated in Critical Pedagogy, faculty can assist students in overcoming the obstacles they encounter due to their background. According to the interviews, faculty found that the students believed their learning was the responsibility of the instructor. When individuals enter college, they are maturing and entering the stage of their life where they are considered an adult. This transition includes becoming less dependent on others and increasing autonomy. Faculty should create an environment where independence and ownership over one’s education is valued. Knowles (1984) states this can be done by helping students formulate their own learning goals and providing students with the resources for learning. Because adults are typically more

secure in their self-concept, they should have a say in their learning. A key factor in critical pedagogy is having students draw on their life experiences to increase their engagement (Friere, 1970). Instructors can use small groups and have students discuss their experiences with one another, as it relates to the course content. First-generation students may have different life experiences than those of a traditional background, but they are not any less valuable and should be used to promote learning. By doing this, students feel as if they are contributing and instructors are meeting the students where they are, by using their background as a starting point for learning.

Institutional Factors and Pedagogy. Institutional factors affecting retention include organizational, academic and social factors. Organizational factors encompass the various department and areas within a university setting including financial aid, campus organizations, housing, and counseling services. According to the interviews, one faculty member stated that the branch campus is so small that the students go from class to class in groups, very similar to a high school experience. The residence halls are steps away from the academic building, and there are fewer resources offered on campus, as compared to a larger university setting. While some faculty view the branch campus as a transition to the larger campus, others feel it hinders their progress to grow and develop as a college student. The academic factor includes the level of interaction with faculty, involvement in academic advising, and class attendance. First-generation students are less likely to interact with faculty, likely due to their upbringing with parents who exhibited a less involved style of parenting and encouraged their children not to question authority (Lareau, 2003). Social factors affecting retention include the number of close friendships on campus, involvement in student organizations, and being able to

identify with a group on campus. The more involved a student is in their college experience, the greater success they will have (Amelink, 2005).

Strengthening the student-faculty relationship is one way to combat these institutional factors which affecting retention. As it's been noted several times throughout this study, the faculty-student relationship is an important factor in first-generation student success. According to critical pedagogy, students are used to viewing instructors as being in a position of power and authority, as opposed to someone that will help them learn. These students would benefit from a problem-centered focus. According to Friere (1970), the "problem-posing model" encourages instructors to provide choices and bring students into the conversation to foster a collaborative learning environment. Together, faculty and students can unveil reality and co-create knowledge, which strengthens their relationship. Students then become aware of their position in society and the forces that have ruled them and shaped their consciousness. This awareness leads to students gaining the necessary tools to begin to change the system that oppressed them in the first place. With this knowledge, students will use their positions at this branch campus to tackle real-world issues, particularly those impacted by the organizational, academic, and social factors discussed above. Through their newly discovered awareness and knowledge, students become "problem solvers" and seek to change issues within the institution, which could be anything from limited diversity in student organizations to inequalities in housing and financial aid. This will lead to their increased involvement on campus and the confidence to seek out and engage in the many resources and opportunities that a college environment offers.

Environmental Factors and Pedagogy. Financial resources, family responsibilities, off-campus employment and pre-existing relationship outside of college. Research shows that 72% of first-generation students work while in college, so financial resources are often limited for these students (The College Board, 2016). One instructor mentioned that students requested that the electronic version of the textbook be put on D2L, because the print version was too expensive. While limited finances may not be unique to just first-generation students, it is just an additional obstacle that they must overcome, particularly when many do not have a family with the means to support them. A struggle with balancing home life and their college life is common for many first-generation students, so they are less likely to become involved in college activities and spend considerably less time devoted to their studies than traditional college students (Petty, 2014), which can be a barrier to retention as seen in the social factor.

To help combat these environmental factors, faculty and administration should join together to identify students in need of intervention. As discovered in the interviews, an academic and administrative collaboration was a very effective tool in reaching students before they fell too far behind. While it is a recommendation from this research that collaborative intervention programs be implemented on campuses (or departments) that have a first-generation/underprepared student population, there are other strategies that can be employed by instructors inside of their classroom, to assist students in overcoming the environmental barriers.

Instructors are advised to not only encourage students to recognize their life experiences as valuable tools for learning but to emphasize real-world application of material. This allows students to feel comfortable addressing conflicts with outside

relationships and responsibilities that occur outside of their “student” role, such as working off-campus or existing relationships “back home”. According to the readiness to learn principle of andragogy, adults are in multiple roles (as are first-generation students) and they must be in a state where they are ready to learn, yet still able to meet the demands of their daily lives (Houde, 2006). This is where faculty can encourage students to apply the material to their own lives and provide opportunities for them to use the knowledge to prepare for real-world situations. Students will feel empowered and a sense of control that will allow them to overcome the environmental factors that typically prevent students from succeeding.

Psychological Factors and Pedagogy. Students are impacted by psychological factors that affect success, such as decreased self-confidence, lacking the motivation to study, and not placing a value over their education. Many first-generation students also doubt their ability to succeed in college (Tym, McMillion, Barone, Webster, 2004). This was a concern for almost all the faculty interviewed for the study. Several of them felt like it was their responsibility to develop their student’s confidence and ensure they felt like they were a part of the community. Because of the perceptions of these students, they tend to view college as being unsupportive, which hinders their learning and development (Pike and Kuh, 2005). Typically, it was the more experienced faculty members who focused on the psychological factors of students.

To increase motivation, principles of andragogy state that adult learners are motivated with internal rewards, such as self-esteem, as opposed to grades. With this knowledge, faculty are encouraged to find rewards that address the internal motivators of students, which several of the participants interviewed were already doing. Also, if

students are unable to find value in what is being taught, instructors are encouraged to continue finding ways to apply real-world examples to the material. This will increase motivation to learn because the material is relevant to them. Examples can also be used that show students what the consequences would be if they didn't learn the material (based in reality).

The Impact of Capital

Social class impacts individuals in numerous ways, as Lareau (2003) found in her study of families. There are distinct parenting styles that emerged out of the study, with lower-class families promoting “natural growth” and middle-class families promoting “concerted cultivation”. Lower-class families utilized an unstructured and hands-off approach to parenting and did not take an active role in their education. According to Lareau, this type of parenting style may put students at a disadvantage in higher education. When lower-class, first-generation students enter college, they are unprepared and already experiencing the social inequality due to their background (Wacquant, 2005). These students do not take an active role in their education, and as it was noted in the findings from interviews with faculty, they believe that faculty will pass them regardless of the effort they put into their work.

Another impact of social class is the accumulation of capital, which can occur in three forms: economic, social, and cultural (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital refers to cash and property, and social capital is the social connections and network of relationships one possesses. For this section, I will focus on cultural capital, the knowledge, behaviors, and skills accumulated from one's social standing. Bourdieu (1973) has pointed out that cultural capital is unequally distributed and is something that

first-generation students do not acquire prior to attending college. Unlike traditional college students from middle class or upper-middle class families, who arrive to college with capital and are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that higher education provides them, many first-generation students do not have that same experience.

Colleges and universities have their own norms within the campus culture, and for those lacking cultural capital, they may have trouble “fitting in” and not have a basic understanding of the behaviors typical for that environment. The faculty in this study agreed, with a couple mentioning that the students seem to lack any basic understanding of how to act in a college class. One participant said they had to break down everything and not assume that the students knew anything. This instructor explained everything from a syllabus to office hours; items that aren’t necessarily “taught” to incoming freshmen, but that faculty may assume they already know. Again, for those students with parents who are college educated, that knowledge would likely get passed down to the student, already providing them with an advantage against first-generation students.

The literature tells us that first-generation students may feel like they don’t belong in college due to their lack of understanding of the norms of the college environment (Aries & Sieiders, 2005). One benefit to the branch campus used in the study is its’ small size, which could provide an easier transition to college for many students. As faculty noted, many of the students are in the same classes together, faculty tend to know the students and see them around the buildings, and the residence halls are just feet away from the academic building. On the other hand, as one instructor stated, the

campus environment is a disadvantage for students considering they will eventually transfer to the larger university setting and may not have acquired the skills to succeed there. While faculty try to increase cultural capital and change habitus inside the classroom, the student sub-culture may reinforce the habitus that the students brought to school. This is likely further impacted by the physical environment, being that the branch campus lacks the resources and activities that one can find at larger universities, the students are more likely to hang out with other students on campus where their “old habitus” can thrive.

The more experienced faculty appeared to have a deeper understanding of the background of first-generation students, particularly those who are underprepared. That may explain why they did not have as many issues with participation, attendance and misbehaviors, when compared with newer faculty. According to those interviewed, the key is to lay out the classroom policies on the first day and stick to them. However, there was no “one size fits all” approach that appeared to work for all faculty interviewed.

One thing that is certain from the study and the literature, is that first-generation students face barriers to succeeding in college. The research questions assisted in identifying the differences between first-generation students and traditional students, the background and the level of preparation that faculty had prior to teaching at the study site, and best practices for teaching first-generation students. What follows is further implications on policy and practice to assist faculty in helping first-generation students succeed.

Limitations

This methodology is low-risk to participants; however, all research presents some risk (Babbie, 2010), such as researcher bias and participant reactivity. Because the interview questions asked participants to reflect on their teaching experiences, participants may not provide genuine responses for fear they may be viewed negatively. Since researcher bias is a limitation in all qualitative research, I have addressed this by acknowledging my history as a teacher at the study site and familiarity with some of the participants. Additional limitations for the study include only talking to 11 faculty members and utilizing a sample at only one small branch campus of one university.

Implications for Policy and Practice: Key Practices for Instructors

In the first chapter, I discussed how instructors may find situations where students are unengaged and disinterested, or their institution is facing increasing pressure to improve graduation and retention rates. Literature revealed that first-generation students require different teaching strategies to be successful. This is due to the unique background of first-generation students, where they lack adequate high school preparation and family support and arrive to college with limited capital.

Andragogy and critical pedagogy provide a framework for instructors to assist students in achieving success in the classroom. With andragogy, Knowles (1984) found that adult learners learn differently than children, requiring something outside of pedagogy which typically focuses on the instructor teaching youth. Aspects of andragogy can be applied to first-generation students, as these students are often older, nontraditional learners. Critical pedagogy encourages the oppressed student to use their life experiences to question their social position and engage in tackling real-life

issues with the assistance of faculty. These theories are used as a guide to develop best practices for teaching first-generation students, based on the findings from the study. Data was collected from eleven faculty members at a branch campus of a university, through the form of semi-structured interviews.

The research questions for the study are:

- 1. In what ways did instructors come to see the first-generation college students they were teaching at the branch campus as different from the students they taught at the main campus?*
- 2. How prepared were faculty to teach first generation college students?*
- 3. What are the teaching practices and strategies used to encourage success for first-generation college students at a first-year regional branch campus of a state university?*

The significance of this study provides instructors with resources to better meet the needs of first-generation college students, since they graduate at lower rates than traditional college students (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, Tran, 2011). An understanding of first-generation students and the strategies to use in the classroom can be a useful guide for anyone who interacts with this population. Additionally, I hope to encourage faculty to use their position to assist first-generation students in acquiring capital, so that they may increase their upward mobility after college (Keeling & Hersh, 2011). Using the findings from this study, it is suggested that universities and faculty adopt the following key practices to improve faculty-student relationships and create opportunities for first-generation students to achieve success in the classroom: Teacher training, faculty and administrative collaboration in the areas of student support and intervention, instructor enthusiasm, student ownership of learning, clear classroom

expectations, timely and descriptive feedback, and real-world application using life experiences.

Teacher Training

First, it would benefit future teachers and universities to have teacher training programs available for graduate students with an interest in teaching at the higher education level. Since 70 percent of current faculty positions are primarily teaching focused, as opposed to a mix of teaching and research, effective training is necessary to prepare students for teaching (Alsop, 2018). This can be accomplished with Teaching Assistant positions in graduate programs, to help them prepare and gain experience with the help of more experienced faculty. Teacher certification and faculty development programs are other ways to offer teaching training. Graduate students can enroll in a teacher certification program while they are currently enrolled as a graduate students and current faculty can participate in development workshops and seminars. The faculty in this study often expressed a need for additional preparation when teaching first-generation students at the study site. While this branch campus may be a unique situation, one can see how any faculty (especially newer faculty) could benefit from ongoing development and training, to discuss effective teaching strategies and problem-solving.

Faculty and Administrative Collaboration

As several participants stated, they felt as if they were on their own with addressing student issues. Students need to see faculty and administration working together in unison to support a students' success. One way they can work together is by creating an early intervention program to identify "at risk" students. The faculty in the

study, particularly those who have taught for more than 2 years, reminisced when the faculty-staff team was in place on campus, and met monthly to identify and create plans for those students in need of an intervention. Those faculty agreed that it was a worthwhile and effective program. With this program no longer in place, not only do the older faculty miss its presence on campus but newer faculty (without knowing the program existed) remarked that they do not have any support outside of the classroom, in regard to the administrators. Universities and departments are advised to have a system in place where faculty and staff can regularly communicate and identify students who are falling behind, and then implement strategies to re-engage that student.

Instructor Enthusiasm

All the participants with an extensive teaching history (10+ years) conveyed a sense of enthusiasm during the interviews and exhibited confidence in their teaching strategies. This was not evident in the interviews with newer faculty. The experienced instructors often commented about the nature of their classes being “hands on” and “full of activity” and “always moving”, which I believe is due to their enthusiasm for the content and their desire to display that to their students. Research shows that faculty who put their enthusiasm for the material on display during class receive higher student ratings (Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, and Reif, 1987; Oesch, 2005).

Therefore, faculty are encouraged to ensure that students can sense their passion for the material. This can be done by discussing their own intellectual journey, including the obstacles they encountered along the way. Instructors can also use humor and move around the room, to keep students engaged and not focused on just the front of the room. While not all personalities are suited for making grand, dramatic gestures while

teaching, faculty can utilize any of these tips to show off their enthusiasm and further engage students in their classroom.

Student Ownership of Learning

First, students are encouraged to be responsible for their education (Ortega-Villalobos, 2009). According to Astin (1984), growth and development occurs when a student is engaged in their learning. Evidence of this can be found throughout the interviews, when faculty discussed how first-generation students seem to have an expectation that because a faculty member is nice, they will pass them. Students also seemed to believe (according to the participants) that despite how little they attend class or missed homework assignments, they will still pass the class. To get students to become responsible for their learning, faculty and students can work together to create awareness of students' position in society (Friere, 1970). By doing so, students will gain the resources to understand their problems and take action. This increased responsibility will provide confidence to take ownership of their education, which can be done through self-directed learning. This type of learning is typical in andragogy and suggests that a classroom should be supportive, and faculty and students work together to plan the learning goals for individual students (Knowles, 1980).

Clear Expectations

The background that first-generation students bring with them does not include an existing knowledge of classroom behavior and college expectations. According to the participants in the interviews, many stated that students just don't know what to do and that the instructors must guide the students in basic classroom etiquette. Research shows that first-generation students perform better when they know what is expected of

them (Collier & Morgan, 2008). To implement a practice of clarity in expectations, faculty should include their expectations in the syllabus, discuss it at the start of every semester (and regularly remind students throughout the semester), and model appropriate behavior for the students. Do not make assumptions as to what students should know. As previously discussed with Lareau's study on parenting and childhood, lower class families were not actively involved or engaged in their children's education, therefore many first-generation students come to college without having any pre-existing notions of how to behave or interact as a college student.

Timely, Descriptive Feedback

Supiano (2001) encouraged instructors to look beyond letter grades and percentages, to increase student motivation. This type of individualized instruction sets first-generation students up for success by increasing their motivation through appropriate feedback that moves beyond numerical grading. A principle of andragogy looks at motivating students with internal rewards such as self-esteem and recognition, as opposed to just letter grades and percentages (Knowles, et al, 1998). Descriptive feedback can touch on these internal rewards and ensure students feel confident and valued, because the faculty member took the time to provide the feedback. Additionally, several participants in the study were already engaging in timely and immediate feedback. As one instructor stated, they want students to always know where they stand, so they provide immediate feedback on their performance. By doing this, there are no surprises and students will not fall too far behind and become surprised with their grade at the end of the semester.

Real-world Application Using Life Experiences

The participants in this study found that students were engaged when there was graded work each class, which focused on real world application. Adult learners tend to learn better when their experiences are used as a tool for learning. As discussed in the literature, adults tend to tie their identity to the experiences, therefore by acknowledge what students bring with them to class is also acknowledging that individual's value as a student. Real-world application of material can be used through small group discussions and promotes relationship building among peers. First-generation students would benefit from a problem-based approach to learning as they relate the material to their lives and work with faculty as partners in learning (Friere, 1970). Faculty are encouraged to embrace this practice by using the material they teach in a manner that solves problems and can be applied to real-life situations.

In summary, the findings from the study provided seven key practices that universities and instructors should consider adopting. These practices include teacher training, faculty and administrative collaboration in the areas of student support and intervention, instructor enthusiasm, student ownership of learning, clear classroom expectation, timely and descriptive feedback, and real-world application using students' life experiences. By engaging in these practices, instructors will create opportunities for students to succeed.

Directions for Future Research

This study was done to provide insight into best practices and classroom strategies that are effective for the first-generation student population. Not only is this important for university graduation and retention rates but the economic effect is crucial

as well, as students who are successful in college are more likely to experience upward mobility (Keeling & Hersh, 2011). Future research should seek to include a larger sample by utilizing additional study sites, particularly those of varying backgrounds (size, public vs private) as well as a larger number of participants. With a larger sample, more detailed information can be obtained, and it can be generalized to a larger population.

The findings from this study provide possibilities for additional areas to explore, particularly in the area of the campus culture and the academic and administration relationship. Though it was not a part of the interview guide, the physical environment of the branch campus was a theme that arose from coding the data. Future studies could examine the physical characteristics of a university and its' impact on student success. Throughout this study, it was noted that the small campus size and rural location provided few resources and opportunities for students to broaden their experiences and networks. Research could look at larger universities located in communities conducive to a college student population, with abundant activities and resources, and explore if first-generation students were able to come out of their current habitus and gain capital through their experiences there.

The next area for future research could look at the relationship between administration and academia and how it affects first-generation resources, particularly in advising and programming. This study provided insight into how a program developed between academia and administration was successful in providing intervention strategies for students falling behind, however, when that program ceased to exist, many faculty noted its absence was detrimental to the success of students who were

struggling early in the semester. Participants felt as if they did not have the support of administration, which several felt was important to ensure students succeed inside and outside of the classroom.

This study provides a number of best practices and strategies for teaching first-generation students. However, there are a number of areas that can be further explored. By exploring the identified areas, we can continue to develop a deeper understanding of first-generation students' experience in college, which will allow us to continue creating better opportunities for them.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on teaching practices and first-generation students by interviewing faculty members who predominantly teach first-generation students at a branch campus of a public university. The literature on pedagogy often refers to traditional college students and not first-generation students who arrive to college underprepared. First-generation college students do not learn the same way as students who come from traditional backgrounds. By using standard pedagogy, these students are falling behind and not graduating at the same rates as their peers. The findings from this research provide a list of key practices that universities and instructors can adopt to specifically meet the needs of first-generation college students.

It is imperative that instructors gain insight into the background of first-generation students. According to Lareau (2003), lower-class parents did not interfere in their child's education and the children in these families were taught to obey authority and not question things. There is evidence that this mindset carries over into college, where these children have trouble taking ownership of their education and understanding that

they are active participants in their learning. First-generation students typically arrive to college with less capital than their peers, which provides an additional barrier for them to overcome. By using andragogy and critical pedagogy as a guide, faculty can help these students accumulate capital and incorporate the key practices from this study into their classroom. Andragogy focuses on adult learners but provides suggestions for teaching nontraditional students who have life experiences and different learning needs. Critical pedagogy looks at those who have been oppressed and encourages them to use their experiences to become engaged in today's world. The faculty-student relationship in both approaches is an important factor to achieve success.

In total, this research supports 7 key practices that instructors should adhere to, when teaching first-generation students:

- Participate in ongoing faculty training and development on pedagogy
- Collaborate with administrators
- Display enthusiasm when teaching.
- Encourage students to take ownership of their learning.
- Be clear with expectations and emphasize them at the start of the semester. Don't assume that students know what to do.
- Provide feedback should be descriptive and timely.
- Use students' life experiences for real-world application of the learning material.

This research applies to anyone who works and interacts with first-generation students within the higher education system, not just instructors. The findings can be used to set first-generation students up for success by creating opportunities in the

classroom for them to grow and develop through their college career. On a larger scale, by adjusting teaching strategies for this population, first-generation students can hopefully graduate at the same rates as their peers.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Emails

Recruitment Email 1

My name is Jennifer Mahon Kush and I am a Ph.D. student in the Administration & Leadership Studies department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. My dissertation, 'Faculty Experiences of First-Generation Students', looks to explore faculty members' experiences teaching first-generation students and seeks to identify successful classroom practices.

I am reaching out to you, because you are a current faculty member at the study site, and would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one discussion regarding your experiences teaching students. It is expected that the discussion/interview will last approximately 45 minutes. A list of the questions will be sent to you prior to the interview, so that you may review them, and informed consent will be obtained prior to your participation. The Informed Consent Letter is attached for your review.

Please reply to this email with your willingness to participate and I will then contact you for details regarding time and location.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

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Recruitment Email 2

My name is Jennifer Mahon Kush and I am a Ph.D. student in the Administration & Leadership Studies department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. My dissertation, 'Faculty Experiences of First-Generation Students', looks to explore faculty members' experiences teaching first-generation students and seeks to identify successful classroom practices.

I reached out to you last week to invite you to participate in the study because you are a current faculty member at the study site. If you are interested in participating, we will set up a one-on-one discussion/interview which will last approximately 45 minutes. A list of the questions will be sent to you prior to the interview, so that you may review them, and informed consent will be obtained prior to your participation. The Informed Consent Letter is attached for your review.

Please reply to this email with your willingness to participate and I will then contact you for details regarding time and location.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

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Appendix B

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this research study, Faculty Experiences Teaching First-Generation College Students. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you teach at the branch campus of the university that is being studied.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of faculty members who teach first-generation college students. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand the pedagogy of teaching this particular population. Participation in this study has minimal risk and no direct benefit. Participation in this study includes a one-on-one interview and will require approximately 45 minutes of your time. Interviews will be recorded but any information obtained during the interview will be kept confidential and no one will know who did/did not participate in this study. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of actual names, during the transcription process. First, we will schedule a time to interview. The interview consists of approximately 10 questions regarding your teaching style, experiences, and background. You will be supplied with a copy of the questions prior to the interview. Following the interview, participants will have the opportunity to provide material relevant to the study. Submission of any additional documents is voluntary, and student names/identifying information must be redacted prior to submission. The documents are to be sent via email.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying me prior to or during the interview. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your standing at the University. Your response will be identified with a pseudonym, in place of actual names. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please email j.r.mahon@iup.edu with your availability, so that we can schedule a 45-minute interview. If you choose not to participate, you may disregard this email.

Jennifer Mahon Kush, M.A.
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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number or location where you can be reached

Best days and times to reach you

Appendix C

Interview Guide

The following interview questions were developed based on the literature and research questions:

1.) How long have you been teaching at this branch campus? How often do you teach here?

2.) Tell me about your experiences teaching college students, at campuses other than this branch campus? For example, when did you first teach a college class, how many campuses have you taught at, and what were those campuses like?

If not addressed in Question 2:

3.) What sort of experiences, if any, did you have teaching first-generation college students before you taught at this branch campus?

4.) How would you describe your teaching style?

5.) What classroom practices do you believe are most effective in successfully reaching first-generation college students?

6.) Are there specific assignments/methods of assessment that you modified for first-generation college students?

6A.) Can you give me at least 2-3 specific examples?

7.) How do you know when the students are “getting it”?

8.) Where do you come up with ideas for teaching first-generation college students?

9.) How did you handle ‘misbehaviors’ in the classroom?

10.) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences teaching first-generation college students at this branch campus?

11.) Beyond what you have told me, if you think of any additional assignments that you have found especially helpful, please feel free to contact me.