FIELD OF DREAMS: EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS IN HONORS

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

First-generation college students are underrepresented within honors programs and colleges, and their retention and persistence rates lag far behind their continuing-generation peers. Students in honors programs and colleges have higher retention and persistence rates than non-honors students. The best practices within honors have shown to include the best practices that increase first-generation college student persistence. Studies exploring the experiences of first-generation college students in honors are crucial for understanding this population and guiding honors professionals in developing strategies to support first-generation college student persistence and success. This qualitative study explored the experiences of six first-generation college students participating in honors at four-year universities in the United States. The personal stories and experiences of the participants were collected and restoried using a narrative inquiry approach and semi-structured interviews. Narrative inquiry allowed for a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed three distinct themes to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. The themes of relationships, academic self-concept, and influences on the sense of belonging show how the study participants navigated the challenges and opportunities in honors. The participants also offered insight into the social and academic factors that impacted their experiences. The findings underscore the importance of promoting student opportunities to develop relationships with faculty, staff, and students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I am proud to say that tomorrow, I will be a first-generation college graduate.

Alejandro, 2019 honors graduate

A Tale of Two Honors Students

In the late 1980s, Elaine, the oldest of four siblings, was the first in her family to attend university. Elaine's rural high school, where she participated in multiple extracurricular activities, was close to a metropolitan city providing many opportunities. An excellent and active student, she was invited to apply to the honors college at her regional university. Students invited to apply scored in the top ten percent on the state pre-college test and had exceptional high school grade point averages. In addition to her status as a first-generation college student, of the 27 students in her incoming honors class, Elaine was one of only three persons of color.

The student expectations of the honors faculty were high, and the coursework was rigorous and considerable for the number of credits given. The honors college did not provide additional resources to students who needed help such peer advising or mentoring. Elaine withdrew from the honors college in her sophomore year, citing the intensity of the coursework and lack of support. Elaine was also overwhelmed by her perception of the competitive nature of her peers and felt she could not ask for help as she did not want to appear less than capable. Of the 27 students who entered honors at the same time as Elaine, less than fifty percent graduated from the honors college. Beating the odds, Elaine graduated in four years from her university, but without honors. Reflecting on her honors experience, Elaine would have made a different choice from the beginning—she would not have enrolled in honors.

Thirty years after Elaine entered college, Thomas was the first in his family to attend a four-year university. He did well in high school and had aspirations of becoming a doctor. Thomas thought participating in honors would distinguish him in the competitive medical school application process. Thomas felt a deep sense of otherness in school. He carried the weight of negative stereotypes and doubts about his academic and social ability to succeed beyond high school. When Thomas went to college, he struggled to be away from his family for the first time and with the academic and social adjustment to a new environment. In his first year, he came to his honors advisor to withdraw from the university. The main obstacle was his inability to cover the cost of attendance. However, his transitional experience added complexity to his situation. Thomas was not eligible for federal financial aid. He relied on scholarships, minimal state aid, and money saved from summer jobs to cover his expenses.

His honors college assisted him with a scholarship to help cover the first year and an additional scholarship to help with his subsequent years. The money allowed Thomas to stay in college and become a leader in honors. He became an honors student office assistant, an ambassador, and a peer mentor. Thomas credits his participation and experiences in honors as a driving force in his continued success. His time in honors culminated with an address to his friends and family at his honors graduation ceremony. Thomas expressed that honors provided a space where he belonged, felt supported, and was encouraged to reach his potential. Thomas no longer thought he owed anyone an apology for who he was or where he came from because honors helped him find the courage to let his character and accomplishments define him. Thomas did not apply to medical school, which he once would have considered a failure. His dream of becoming a medical professional is very much alive. He is well on his way to becoming a nurse practitioner.

The two stories above describe two very different experiences of first-generation college students in honors. Elaine's story is still often heard in traditional honors settings where honors students are "academically talented undergraduate students (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019, p. 126). In contrast, Thomas's story illuminates the powerful impact honors could have on the experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS) through expanding access and providing support for students to build social capital, increase their self-efficacy, and feel a sense of belonging.

Representing 40% of the enrollment of sixteen million undergraduates in the United States, FGCS are those whose parents do not have a four-year degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; Whitely et al., 2018). Despite representing a significant portion of undergraduate college enrollment, their persistence is lower than their continuing-generation (CG) peers: 48% versus 67% (Glaessgen et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2019; Whitely et al., 2018). After six years, 56% of FGCS had earned a degree compared to 74% of CG (Cataldi et al., 2018). Even though first-generation college students represent nearly half of the undergraduate enrollment, they are significantly underrepresented in honors. First-generation college students represent only 28% of honors college enrollment (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Mead, 2018; National Collegiate Honors Council, n.d.-a; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). For conciseness and clarity, honors colleges and programs are hereinafter referred to collectively as "honors."

The disproportionate representation of FGCS in honors is problematic. The efficacy of honors in increasing retention and graduation rates is demonstrated and proven (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Guzy, 2014; Kampfe et al., 2016; Nichols & Chang, 2013; VanDieren, 2016). The characteristics and benefits of honors, such as small class sizes, seminar-style courses, active learning pedagogies, and dedicated honors advisors, contribute to

program success in retaining and graduating students (Diaz et al., 2019). Many of the benefits of an honors education, such as faculty mentoring, living and learning communities, small classes, and opportunities to build campus networks are confirmed to increase the persistence and retention of FGCS (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Bassett, 2021; Bauman et al., 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017). The increase of FGCS in honors depends on the understanding and explication of honors FGCS experiences (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

While the literature is replete with research extolling the benefits of an honors education, it is relatively silent regarding the experiences of first-generation honors students using a qualitative methodology in peer-reviewed journals (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Goodstein & Szarek, 2013). A literature search of the term "first-generation college student" using OneSearch at a regional comprehensive university resulted in 6,815 articles in peer-review journals from 1992 to 2022, of which less than 150 were qualitative studies. There are qualitative master's theses and doctoral dissertations that address the experiences of FGCS in honors; however, the research has not yet transitioned to published studies in peer-reviewed journals.

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) produces a refereed publication committed to studying and promoting honors education within United States higher education (*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive | National Collegiate Honors Council | University of Nebraska - Lincoln*, n.d.). The NCHC publication focuses on the benefits of honors, honors pedagogy and philosophy, and the characteristics of honors students. Recent discussions within the NCHC have attempted to address the lack of diversity within honors (Badenhausen et al., 2020; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021). A 2020 position paper released by the NCHC addressed honors admissions criteria, marketing strategies, and traditional

honors pedagogy and their effects on the recruitment and participation of students from typically underrepresented groups (Badenhausen et al., 2020).

Cognard-Black and Spisak (2019) found that FGCS were 40% less likely to enroll in honors than continuing-generation students. First-generation college students are more likely than continuing-generation college students to choose less selective institutions and undermatch (Holland, 2020; Ovink et al., 2018; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). An undermatch is when student grades and test scores over qualify them for the institution they attend (Ovink et al., 2018). Undermatched students are less likely to graduate than matched students and face longer-term consequences from the undermatch (Kang & García Torres, 2021; Ovink et al., 2018). Undermatched FGCS students benefit from honors, as it provides an environment that challenges them academically while supporting them socially (Diaz et al., 2019).

The underrepresentation of FGCS in honors contributes to their educational marginalization and has a exclusionary effect post-graduation (Duffy et al., 2021; Pincock & Jones, 2020). Marginalization is "the process through which persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments" (Hall et al., 1994, p. 25). First-generation college students report a higher marginalization than their CG peers, resulting in feelings of cultural mismatch (Garriott, 2020; Phillips et al., 2020). By not actively studying FGCS experiences, researchers are further marginalizing already marginalized FGCS students. The qualitative research published about honors and equity issues provides a limited view—without research to provide context, there can be no genuine understanding of the experiences of FGCS in honors (Mead, 2018).

Increasing honors diversity is a positive direction for the honors movement; however, the dearth of research about FGCS in honors does not provide the foundation for professionals to

identify and build best practices to serve this population. Best practices are actions designed to bring forth a designated outcome and are supported by evidence (Baker et al., 2020; Bretschneider et al., 2005). Best practices in the classroom include using active learning techniques, which studies have shown are efficacious in increasing academic performance (Baepler et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2014; McConnell et al., 2017). While the literature has proven active learning to be an effective teaching strategy, the efficacy of the techniques varies according to the student population (Eddy & Hogan, 2014). Active learning techniques move beyond the traditional lecture and promote more interaction between the teacher and the learner (Mazer & Hess, 2017). Eddy and Hogan (2014) found that active learning techniques significantly affect first-generation students for the better.

Freire (1993) described the banking concept of education when the student acts as the repository of information that the teacher deposits. When it is time to test the learner's knowledge, the teacher takes out precisely what they deposited. In this model, there is no responsibility on the part of the learner to make decisions about the information presented. This process lacks autonomy, as the teacher controls what goes in (lecture) and out (quiz/test). Hicks (2009) defined education as a collaborative process of teaching and learning, which the banking model, as explained by Freire, lacks. Active learning pedagogies benefit learners by engaging them beyond rote memorization. In the process of learning, the student takes knowledge and puts it into practice to develop skills that prepare them for life (Hicks, 2009).

First-generation students come to university with lower grade point averages and standardized test scores and are cognitively underprepared compared to their CG peers (Terenzini et al., 1996). Building upon Terenzini et al. (1996), Atherton (2014) found that first-generation students lacked the social capital and academic preparedness to ensure collegiate

success. The description of FGCS expressed here by well-meaning researchers, including Atherton, perpetuates a deficit view of FGCS. The findings and conclusions of quantitative research that demonstrate differences between FGCS and their CG peers are not factually incorrect; however, without context, they perpetuate FGCS stereotypes, leading to stereotype threat. First identified by Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat is a conflict created when a person believes their actions contribute to the plausibility of a stereotype.

First-generation college students have more motivation than their CG peers (Antonelli et al., 2020). While Antonelli et al. (2020) found only a slight difference in motivation between FGCS and CG, it was enough to encourage higher education professionals to capitalize on FGCS motivation to help them persist and graduate. Research that focuses on the experiences of FGCS in honors and situates them in a positive and strengths-based position will balance the stereotypical view of FGCS.

Background

First-generation college students account for more than one-third of higher education enrollment; however, owing to the challenges faced by FGCS, their persistence rate is much lower than continuing-generation students (students with at least one parent who has a four-year degree) (Pratt et al., 2019; Whitely et al., 2018). First-generation college students are more likely to come to university academically underprepared, lacking social capital, and needing to learn and acculturate to a new and foreign environment (Atherton, 2014; Glaessgen et al., 2018; Terenzini et al., 1996). First-generation students also reported feelings of otherness—exclusion due to their identity, first-generation status, or ethnicity (Beasley et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020).

In Vincent Tinto's (1975) seminal work on why students depart from the university, he theorized that students left institutions for two reasons: failure to integrate academically and failure to integrate socially. Students may integrate socially through participation in social opportunities on campus but not realize the same integration in the academic realm (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975) found that a student's college experience is influenced by their "individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments" (p.96). Students who do not build those relationships cannot fully integrate into the institution, which leads to their eventual departure (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984) focused on activities that that led to either attrition or persistence by observing the outward actions of students. While Tinto (1975) studied why students leave, Astin (1984) developed a theory as to why students stay wherein he found that when students spend more time involved with the university, they are more likely to persist. Astin (1984) preferred a simple and straightforward definition of involvement, which he defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). The frequency and quality of the relationships students establish with campus programs, faculty, staff, and peers are related to their college success (Astin, 1984). A sense of belonging is an internal feeling that one matters and is essential to others (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012), in his work with students, uses a strengths-based approach to increasing belonging as it provides positive insights for students. In addition to outward actions, it is also essential to consider internal factors. A sense of belonging impacts student persistence; having it contributes to staying, whereas lack of belonging contributes to them leaving (Museus & Chang, 2021; Salusky et al., 2022). Students educated in a strengths-based environment that focused on what they do well increased their academic self-efficacy, engagement, and persistence to

graduation (Soria et al., 2017). Retention and persistence of FGCS are also affected by how and if they build social capital and participate in high-impact practices (Conefrey, 2021; Havlik et al., 2020).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this project that explores the experiences of first-generation college students participating in honors at regional comprehensive universities:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation students participating in university honors programs or colleges?
2. How has the honors experience shaped and influenced the college experience outside of honors in first-generation honors students?
3. How do first-generation students experience a sense of belonging and self-efficacy in and through their honors education?

Description of Terms

The following terms and definitions result from the literature on first-generation college students and honors programs/colleges in higher education. The description of terms clarifies the explored research and the research conducted for this dissertation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Academic self-concept. The confidence a student experiences in their ability compared to their academic peers (Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020).

Belonging. A feeling of connectedness and social support on campus leading to feelings of acceptance, respect, and value by others (Strayhorn, 2012).

Continuing generation student. An undergraduate student who has at least one parent who completed an undergraduate degree (Glaessgen et al., 2018).

Cultural capital. Familiarity and knowledge, dispositions, and practices gained from family and social interactions that make it easier for an individual to access and navigate institutional structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Meehan & Howells, 2019; Richards, 2022).

Cultural mismatch. The institutional devaluing of students' cultural experiences (Hecht et al., 2021).

First-generation college student. An undergraduate student whose parents did not complete a four-year degree (Glaessgen et al., 2018).

High impact practices. Researched and tested teaching and learning practices with proven benefits for students, especially underrepresented students (Kuh, 2008).

Honors education. "Honors education is characterized by in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences" and "include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy" (National Collegiate Honors Council, n.d.-b).

Impostor phenomenon. A belief that recognition from intellectual pursuits is unwarranted and not resultant of personal efforts but is because of luck or a mistake (Clance & Imes, 1978; Holden et al., 2021).

Marginalization. "The process through which persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments" (Hall et al., 1994, p. 25).

Perfectionism. Overly critical of self with high and unrealistic expectations (Frost et al., 1990; Grugan et al., 2021; Woodfin et al., 2020).

Self-efficacy. One's belief in their ability to accomplish an action (Bandura, 1982).

Social capital. The resources available to someone through creating and cultivating relationships and networks (Schwartz et al., 2018).

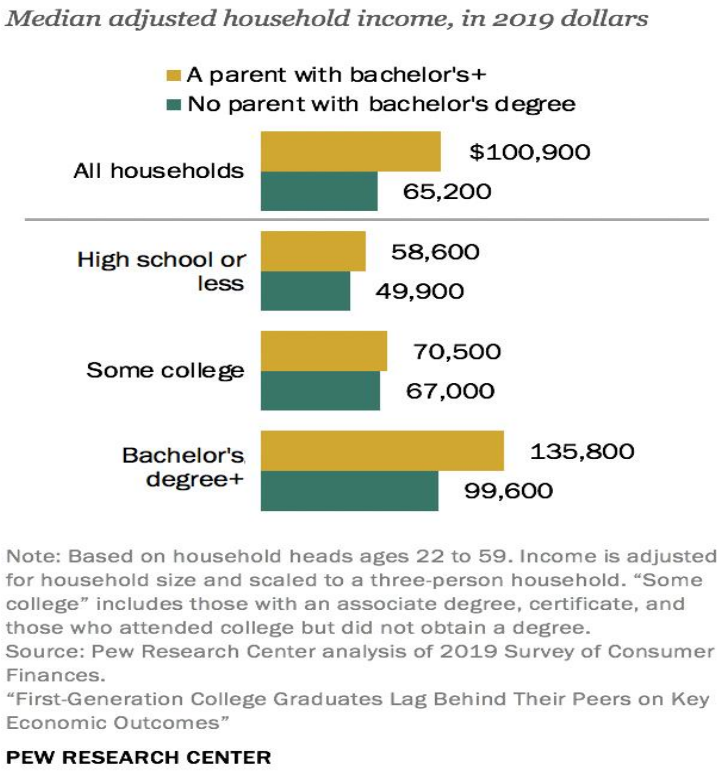
Undermatch. A student's academic profile matches a more selective institution, but they attend a less selective institution (Cook, 2022; Kang & García Torres, 2021; Ovink et al., 2018).

Significance of the Study

First-generation students view earning a college degree as a way to improve their lives and the lives of their families (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Bauman et al., 2019). The power of a college degree to increase upward mobility is supported by Manzoni and Streib's (2019) research, which found no wage gap between FGCS and continuing generation students (CGS) when comparing both groups entering the same job-market sector. Manzoni and Streib's (2019) findings differ from the Pew Research Center's data, which found a $36K income difference between FG and CG college graduates (see Figure 1). The Pew Research did not disaggregate the data into the industry, regional location, or gender. The wage gap between FGCS and CGS is affected more by the university's selectivity, majors, and gender than their generational status (Manzoni & Streib, 2019). However, based on the wage earnings of FG college graduates, a college degree increases median earnings, which also affects the earnings of following generations, building generational educational and earnings wealth (Fry, 2021; Manzoni & Streib, 2019).

Figure 1

Median Income and Degree Status



Note. Included with permission. See Appendix Q. (Fry, 2021)

The literature regarding honors education has largely ignored the experience of FGCS in honors education, with the research focusing on the differences between honors and non-honors students. The NCHC recognizes the need to change admissions criteria that have traditionally shut out FGCS and denied them the opportunity to participate in an educational experience that increases engagement, retention, and persistence to graduation (Badenhausen et al., 2020). The experiences of honors students are not monolithic; while the lack of research about the experiences of FGCS in honors would gesture toward such a view.

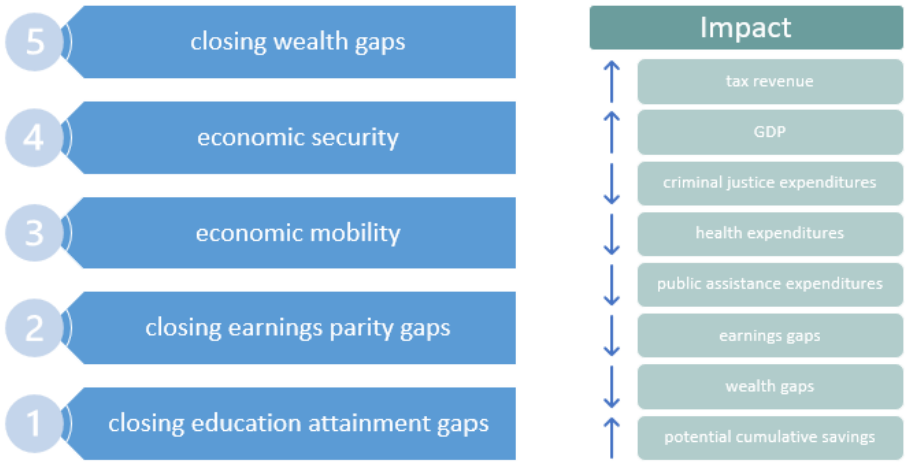
The attrition of first-generation college students has been recognized as an issue by university officials; however, honors professionals have years of research and studies upon

which to base and develop their professional practice, but the scope is limited and must widen to include FGCS and other underrepresented students within honors (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Xu, 2018). This study is an opportunity to fill a substantial gap in the research and literature about understanding the experiences of FGCS who are an underrepresented minority in honors, without whose voice honors cannot develop interventions that will aid in their inclusion and persistence (Gibau, 2015).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Article 13: 2(c) states, “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all” (United Nations, 1966); however, the statistics reveal and demonstrate the stark inequities within the American higher education system between FGCS and their CG peers. An educated citizenry benefits the graduate and society, and investment in universities' equitable recruitment and retention practices, especially honors, does not return void (R. Brown et al., 2019; Carnevale et al., 2021; Hilton & Jordan, 2021; Mead, 2018). Degree attainment of FGCS not only improves outcomes for the degree holder but also has positive effects on society (Carnevale et al., 2021). Wage gaps close with first-generation graduates getting closer to earnings parity, increasing tax revenue (Carnevale et al., 2021; Manzoni & Streib, 2019). A college degree also improves the community's safety as it reduces crime (Carnevale et al., 2021; Dennison, 2019). See Figure 2 for the benefits of equity as reported by the Postsecondary Value Commission of Georgetown University (Carnevale et al., 2021).

Figure 2

Value to society of greater income, racial, & gender equity



Note. (Carnevale et al., 2021)

Overview of Research Methods

This qualitative research seeks to fill the literature gap in exploring the experiences of FGCS participating in honors. The methodology for this study is narrative inquiry, as it uses the individual stories of the participants to explore their lived experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Haydon et al., 2018). Narrative inquiry provides an approach that allows the participants' stories to be experienced and examined by the researcher and the research participants (Seiki et al., 2018). The overarching theme of the research within this study is equity, and a narrative inquiry approach contributes to creating equitable practices by sharing and exploring storied experiences (Seiki et al., 2018).

Semi-structured narrative interviews with FGCS participating in honors at four-year institutions within the United States provided the answers to the research questions. The researcher sought participants through social media accounts, including Facebook posts in honors and first-generation groups. The researcher also posted a request for participants on the

NCHC's internal message board. The number of interviews needed to reach 80%-90% code saturation ranges between six and 16 (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink et al., 2017; Namey et al., 2016). This research study include a sample size of six. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded, as the participants were located at institutions across the United States, limiting the ability to conduct in-person interviews. An outside transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews to prepare them for coding. The participants were sent the identified themes with the caveat that not all participants would identify or relate to all themes.

Integrity is essential to the trustworthiness of a study. Data collection, analytical methods, and presentation of findings must meet the high ethical standards of reliability and validity. Reliability is the assurance that the “scores from an instrument are stable and consistent” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 158). Validity is the instrument's appropriateness—that is, it measures what it purports to measure (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.

-Zora Neale Hurston

Introduction

The growth, development, and culture of honors at the tertiary level have experienced significant change since 1921. The honors education movement began with Frank Aydelotte's vision for honors education at Swarthmore in 1921, and one hundred years later, honors programs and colleges are present at over 1500 United States colleges and universities (Rinn, 2003; Scott et al., 2017; Scott & Smith, 2016). Two professional organizations, the defunct Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) and its successor, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), provided an intellectual space to discuss, guide, and protect the integrity of honors education. The growth of honors across the nation led the NCHC to organize regionally into six sub-councils as a vehicle for collaboration and support within geographic locations (*Regional honors - National Collegiate Honors Council*, n.d.).

With the advocacy of the NCHC and its member institutions, many colleges and universities elevated their honors programs to honors colleges, providing parity with other academic colleges and further professionalizing the field (Scott et al., 2017; Scott & Smith, 2016). Honors became and continues to be as a means of recruiting high-achieving students to public institutions (R. Brown et al., 2019). As more first-generation students enrolled in college, honors recognized that admissions standards and practices were inequitable, discouraging the participation of first-generation students' participation as well as other typically

underrepresented groups (Badenhausen et al., 2020; Hilton & Jordan, 2021). Discussions of access and equity by NCHC member institutions have sought to dismantle inequitable structures by revising admissions requirements (Badenhausen et al., 2020).

Evaluating and analyzing the characteristics and educational motivation of honors students and FGCS show a clear connection to the benefits of honors for FGCS (Brimeyer et al., 2014; Cosgrove, 2004; Rinn & Plucker, 2019; Shushok, 2006). Current studies have shown the effectiveness of High Impact Practices (HIPs) for FGCS and demonstrated their use in honors (Cognard-Black & Savage, 2016; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). High impact practices such as capstone courses and projects, common intellectual experiences, and learning communities are proven to increase the retention and graduation rates of FGCS, and high-impact practices are the foundation of honors education (Cobane & Jennings, 2017; Conefrey, 2021). The highly demonstratable effectiveness of HIPs for FGCS in honors can be assumed based on previous findings; however, differentiating between causation and correlation is indeterminable.

Honors College Development and Proliferation

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 increased access to higher education by creating and funding land grant institutions and colleges within the United States (Lucas, 2006; Rudolph & Thelin, 1990). Accessibility provided benefits such as increased access to higher education for previously restrained populations, such as people of color or women. Higher education also became a possibility for financially or geographically constrained students (Lucas, 2006). The Morrill Acts were a force in the democratization of higher education for “easing admissions standards and otherwise enhancing access” (Lucas, 2006, p. 151); however, while the standards for entrance into higher education increased access, some institutions, particularly HBCUs, had academic standards that “were actually little more than secondary schools, offering virtually

nothing in the way of defensible college-level instruction," (Lucas, 2006, p. 168). The inconsistency in admissions standards and quality of education laid a foundation for further equity gaps in American higher education.

Honors proliferated at public institutions to meet the need of academically-talented students from diverse backgrounds (Scott et al., 2017). Teaching to the middle and lower end of the academic spectrum did not serve the academically talented student well, which led to finding the best way to educate all students regardless of their ability (Aydelotte, 1944). Dr. Frank Aydelotte, called "in every way the originator of the honors strategy" (Cohen, 1966, p. 12), began his work in honors at Swarthmore in the early twentieth century (Aydelotte, 1944). The Swarthmore honors program was strongly influenced by the Oxford pass-honors system and the Rhodes Scholarship program (Guzy, 2003). The Swarthmore plan utilized what Aydelotte termed the "seminar method, and Oxford's pass/honors approach" (Rinn, 2006, p. 72). Aydelotte believed "the best education should be an active process, not passive" (Rinn, 2006, p. 72). Aydelotte's vision for honors education is evident in contemporary honors teaching and learning practices (Cognard-Black, 2019; Diaz et al., 2019).

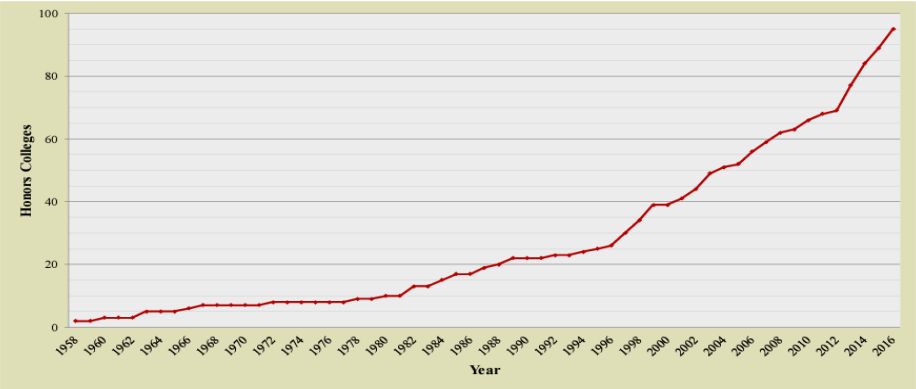
Joseph Cohen of the University of Colorado continued the advocacy of honors with the development of the Honors Council in 1928 (Choroszy & Meek, 2019; Rinn, 2006). Cohen later developed the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), holding its first meeting in the spring of 1957 (Rinn, 2006). The first ICSS conference focused solely on drafting the first set of standards for honors and was a hallmark ICSS contribution; however, the ICSS lasted only eight years (Rinn, 2006). The ICSS was crucial to honors development and led to the 1966 creation of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The NCHC continues its involvement in honors education by hosting an annual conference, publishing national honors

journals, and providing guidance and assessment to member institutions on the development of honors at the institutional level (*National Collegiate Honors Council*, n.d.-c).

While early honors programs typically existed only at private universities and colleges, the first honors college was established at a four-year public university in 1960 at the University of Oregon (Singell & Tang, 2012). Since that auspicious beginning, honors increased by 400% during the twenty years between the 1960s and the 1980s. The honors growth at public institutions reached a plateau during the early 2000s (Cognard-Black, 2017; P. J. Smith, 2020). In the 2010s, with increased student competition, honors saw another spike in growth (Cognard-Black, 2017; Long, 2002; P. J. Smith, 2020).) Honors has proliferated to over 850 institutions, public and private (see Figure 4) (Cognard-Black, 2017; Scott et al., 2017).

Figure 3

Honors Growth



Number of Honors Colleges in the United States by Year
Source: NCHC 2016 *Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges* (n = 95)

Note. Included with permission. See Appendix Q. (Cognard-Black, 2017)

The growth of honors led to the exploration and examination of honors education as a unique research focus and a drive to professionalize the study of honors education—a move to establish honors education as a distinct discipline (P. J. Smith, 2020). The move to professionalize began with the ICSS creating the basic characteristics of honors programs and

colleges (P. J. Smith, 2020). The NCHC's development of the *Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program* and the *Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College* (see Appendices A and B) continued the work by the ICSS and identified best practices in honors education (*NCHC_Basic_Characteristics-College_2017.Pdf*, n.d.; *NCHC_Basic_Characteristics-Program_2017.Pdf*, n.d.; P. J. Smith, 2020). In February 2022, the NCHC replaced the Basic Characteristics documents with *The Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education* (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2022). (See Appendix C).

Figure 4

NCHC Census

NCHC 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges Summary Table

Item	Two-Year Institutions	Four-Year Institutions: Honors Programs	Four-Year Institutions: Honors Colleges	All NCHC Institutions
Total Member Institutions	190	523	136	849
Total responding institutions	84	223	101	408
Response Rate	44.2	42.6	74.3	48.1
Institutional Features				
Size of institution (mean FTE undergraduates)	7,424.5	6,663.0	13,781.0	8,563.7
Number of honors students in fall 2015 (mean)	210.4	385.0	1,023.4	504.2
Institutional control (% public)	100.0	46.6	89.1	68.1
Percent women in honors (mean)	59.6	64.7	61.3	63.0
Carnegie Classification				
Research/Doctoral University (%)	0.0	22.5	54.0	25.6
Master's University (%)	0.0	49.1	46.0	38.2
Baccalaureate College (%)	0.0	28.4	0.0	15.5
Associate's College	100.0	0.0	0.0	20.7

Note. Excerpted in part and included with permission. See Appendix Q.

Other significant influences on the development of honors education are the evolution of curriculum from a prescribed curriculum to a modified elective curriculum and the development of liberal arts and liberal education. Both changes are curriculum-related: one alters the delivery of curriculum, and the other changes the substance of that curriculum. These two influences

shifted honors education from a prescribed curriculum to a modified elective system that emphasized the importance of a liberal arts education.

The British university system strongly influenced the American colonial colleges, which utilized a tutorial system and a prescribed curriculum. (Lucas, 2006) As American higher education advanced, institutions moved away from the British method and toward an elective system. The elective system enabled students to choose what they wanted to study instead of being instructed what to study. Higher education also moved away from the prescribed curriculum as knowledge of the universe increased. It was no longer possible for one person to know all things about everything (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990).

However, before the elective system took hold, the American college struggled to determine a course to set its curriculum (Lucas, 2006). In 1828 the Yale Report was released, portraying an indictment against an elective system and a call to action for a prescribed liberal arts education. Just over 40 years after the release of the Yale Report, the elective system found a champion in Charles Eliot, president of Harvard. The controversy over the most appropriate approach to education, the elective or prescribed system, was grounded in two schools of thought. Eliot, who championed the elective system, believed young men were responsible and mature enough to determine the course of their education (Lucas, 2006). None was more vocal in opposition to the elective system than Yale's Noah Porter, who did not support students choosing their course of study (Lucas, 2006).

While the controversy of the elective system did not end in the latter nineteenth century, the pendulum did swing away from the wholly prescribed curriculum to, at some institutions, a wholly elective approach. As higher education evolved, the prescribed curriculum expanded by incorporating additional areas of study. (Butts, 1939). In the mid-twentieth century, institutions

re-examined the entirely elective university education and shaped a modified elective system to balance the curriculum (Butts, 1939). The modified elective system spurred advancement in education as it allowed opportunities for innovation and collaboration between faculty and students and led the way for the development of the liberal arts education and its influence on honors (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990).

The "liberal arts" refers to specific disciplines such as the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences (Associaton of American Colleges and Universities, n.d.). The liberal arts engages students in ways of thinking and being, which develop their research skills, communication, and critical thinking to prepare them for societal engagement (Moulton, 1988). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.) defines a twenty-first-century liberal education as a way to prepare and empower students to explore broad areas of knowledge to solve complex and diverse issues through participation in civic engagement.

The influences discussed above were the genesis of and for advancing honors in American higher education (Schuman, 2013). Honors programs and colleges were "instituted in hope that they might be a means of permitting the best students, at least, to participate in the real adventure of learning" (Cohen, 1966, p. 76). The curriculum of honors colleges and programs has its roots in the prescribed liberal education first set forth by American colonial colleges (Schuman, 2013). Honors programs and colleges developed as a way for students to receive a liberal arts education as institutions moved away from liberal arts degrees toward degrees preparing students for particular professions (Schuman, 2013).

Honors programs and colleges have many iterations - from special honors sections of regular courses to departmental honors to separate courses explicitly developed for honors students (Cognard-Black & Savage, 2016). Regardless of the form, the "ideal program would

seek to increase significantly the depth and breadth of the education [for] more apt students who are capable of responding and persisting" (Cohen, 1966, p. 100). The benefits of honors are many, not only for the student but also for the home institution that will use the fact that they have an honors program or college as a recruiting tool. Many honors programs market to prospective students that a benefit of enrolling in the honors college is obtaining a "private" liberal arts education at a "public" education price. Students—especially academically talented students—have many choices when selecting a university. Institutions compete to enroll the best and brightest students, and they traditionally used honors programs to bring an Ivy League education to state universities (Weiner, 2009). Honors students help the university as they are not isolated from the general population. They take courses in their majors and minors with other students, positively affecting the classroom environment because their intellectual curiosity does not stop once a student leaves the honors classroom (Clauss, 2011).

Critiques of Honors Education

Since the inception of honors in the American higher education system, there have been questions about the need and utility of honors education, as it is historically viewed as elitist, privileged, and lacking racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019; Weiner, 2009). The argument against honors education due to its lack of diversity is well-earned, as the data regarding honors demography does show a glaring absence of such (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; D. M. Jones, 2017; Rinn & Plucker, 2019; Weiner, 2009). In his 2001 book "Beer and Circus," Murray Sperber lays out an indictment against honors, accusing universities of neglecting undergraduates' general education. Sperber says, "Honors programs and colleges, with their striking contrast to ordinary undergraduate classes, offer the best proof of Big-time

U's neglect of general education" (Sperber, 2001, p. 135). Sperber believes that all students would benefit from the type of education honors students receive. He also believes that aid received by honors students, no matter their need, is better spent on students who have demonstrated financial need. However, Sperber does not provide any research results to lay proof of his claims. Based on his assertions, one can assume that Sperber does not consider honors programs and colleges democratic

Conversely, Frank Aydelotte addressed democracy and honors through his belief that the most democratic education is the one that is best suited to the student's needs and abilities (Aydelotte, 1944). Aydelotte's vision for education allowed each student to grow and develop according to their needs. Aydelotte's philosophy of democratized education is evident in tertiary education. Universities do not force unprepared students who do not meet college-level math or writing standards into courses; instead, they offer developmental courses designed to prepare them for college-level math and writing (May et al., 2021).

Characteristics of Honors and High-Achieving Students

Honors would not exist if not for the students who enroll and participate in the hundreds of honors programs and colleges in the United States. Research studies have explored and attempted to construct an accurate description of an honors student (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Early research into the characteristics of honors students identified them as academically superior, motivated, and ambitious (Achterberg, 2005). While, as suggested by the previous studies, honors students may exhibit specific characteristics that set them apart from the general student population, it is challenging to construct a reliable definition of "honors student" due to the differences in admissions criteria and programming (Achterberg, 2005; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Research into the characteristics of honor students has

found some commonalities. Honors students seek and expect academic challenge and rigor. They are self-motivated, eager to learn, and generally more interested in intrinsic rewards (gaining knowledge) versus extrinsic rewards (grades) (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Honors students are also willing to take intellectual risks, though in some cases their perfectionist nature leads some honors students to risk aversion (Neumeister, 2004a; Slavin, 2008). Students participating in honors have a more developed ability to organize and think critically about information and a more precise understanding of what to expect from college, contributing to their academic savvy (Buckner et al., 2016; Cundall, 2013; Guzy, 2013). When controlling for gender, generational status, age, and major, participation in honors increased student engagement for high-achieving students; however, engagement was highest in the first year and declined as students moved into their major (Miller & Speirs Neumeister, 2017).

It is challenging for honors students to identify a major because they excel at almost everything they do and find it hard to focus on one particular area (Carduner et al., 2011; M. Johnson et al., 2018). Their multipotentiality has positive and negative effects on their ability to decide on a major and career focus (Carduner et al., 2011; Cuevas et al., 2017; Rinn & Plucker, 2004; VanLaningham et al., 2019). They need additional help with advising to help guide them in the right direction (M. Johnson et al., 2018; Klein, 2006). Honors students value guidance, making the relationship between them and a faculty mentor vital (Friedman & Friedman, 1986; M. Johnson et al., 2018; Montag et al., 2012).

Studies of honors students have spoken about their academic insecurities, yet they post higher GPAs than their non-honors peers—3.65 for honors and 3.31 for non-honors (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Distinguishing if honors students post higher GPAs because of their honors participation or other pre-college or college

variables is not easy. What is known, though, is honors participation does have a significant effect on the success of FGCS (Diaz et al., 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Honors programs, which often include activities proven to lead to academic success and university integration, could result in higher GPAs. Moreover, honors students are more likely than non-honors peers to meet with faculty (M. Johnson et al., 2018; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). The research on honors students has resulted from professionals working in honors, with very few studies conducted by researchers outside of honors. However, the research only narrowly focuses on the experiences of high-achieving students participating in honors and does not explicate the experiences of high-achieving first-generation college students in honors.

While honors students are academically talented, they worry they are not smart enough and, though said over 40 years ago, honors first-generation college students of today still "reveal a marked similarity in the misgivings, self-questionings, frustrations, triumphs, and discoveries that chart the way toward personal and intellectual maturity" (Cohen, 1966, p. 56; Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020). Despite any misgivings they may have about their intellectual abilities, most honors students thrive when presented with challenges, and their time to degree is shorter than high-achieving students not in honors (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Cosgrove, 2004; Diaz et al., 2019). Resources to support persistence are readily available and offered in honors, supporting their shorter time to degree (Diaz et al., 2019). In one study, 92% of honors students self-reported participation in gifted programming during their elementary, middle, or high school experience, gesturing toward a dissonance between their perceived academic ability and actual academic ability (Miller & Speirs Neumeister, 2017).

Characteristics of First-Generation College Students

The most commonly used definition of a first-generation college student is a student whose parents did not attain a four-year degree (Glaessgen et al., 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Although the definition above frequently appears in literature, there is no official definition (Glaessgen et al., 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). The studies used to prepare this section may have used different definitions of FCGS; however, for clarity and consistency, when writing about FGCS, the above definition is assumed.

The Pew Research Center reported in May of 2021 that FGCS still lag behind their continuing generation peers in degree attainment, median salary, and wealth (the whole of their assets minus debt) (Fry, 2021). About 70% of continuing-generation students completed a bachelor's degree compared to only 26% of first-generation students, the median salary of CG graduates is $135,800 compared to $99,600 for FG graduates, and the median wealth for CG graduates is $244,500, and $152,000 for FG graduates (Fry, 2021). Many factors affect the persistence of FGCS to degree attainment, such as parent involvement, college readiness, social capital, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and academic and university engagement (Cataldi et al., 2018; R. Evans et al., 2020; McCallen & Johnson, 2020; Minicozzi & Roda, 2020; Penzar et al., 2021), which are discussed in further detail below.

Parental and Family Influence

The influence of their parents encourages first-generation college students to persist but, can also cause distress (E. M. Brown et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2020; R. Evans et al., 2020). First-generation college students desire to create a higher quality of life for their families; however, they experience guilt for leaving their families behind in difficult situations (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Pratt et al., 2019). Many FGCS contribute to the family

finances, and by going away to college, they leave their families with a financial gap to fill, so they continue to work while in college to help their families survive, or if they do not have to contribute to their family financially, they experience stress about the financial burden of attending college places on their families (Azmitia et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2018; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2019).

First-generation students also report a mismatch between their families' and their universities' expectations (Chang et al., 2020). A sense of responsibility to provide emotional and other types of support for their families, and when they are unable to meet their families' expectations because of their school responsibilities, it becomes a source of conflict (Bassett, 2021; Chang et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2018). The expectation and desire to spend time with their families while developing autonomy may cause FGCS to experience internal conflict (Gibbons et al., 2019). Students want the support and guidance of their families, just as they did when living at home, but because their families are unfamiliar with the university culture and environment, they cannot provide guidance (Gibbons et al., 2019).

Hopkins et al. (2021), in their research of out-of-classroom engagement experiences, identified three themes: 1) connection, 2) community, and 3) relationships that support institutional success. By developing connections within the university community, students overcame thoughts about leaving—participation in university activities aided their sense of connection. Finding a place where they felt a sense of belonging was essential to their persistence (Hopkins et al., 2021). Parents and families felt they could better ease their students' transition to college when they felt connected to the university by sharing information with the university and other parents (Harper et al., 2020). A strong connection to their families promoted increased belonging, and autonomy, and including parents in the orientation process through

inclusion in summer programming aids in the connection between students and families (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022).

The inability to integrate socially leads to student departure (Tinto, 1975). Social integration is finding and feeling part of a community, and for FGCS finding a community that engages them outside of the classroom provides a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves (Costello et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2021; Pratt et al., 2019). The relationships with faculty and peers are essential to community building and knowing the people they can go to for future guidance (Hopkins et al., 2021; Pratt et al., 2019).

Promoting Success

The academic preparedness of FGCS students is influenced by where they went to high school, the type of high school, their responsibilities outside of school, and the level of support provided by family and teachers (Minicozzi & Roda, 2020; Whiteside, 2021). First-generation college students from rural communities may be academically disadvantaged because they cannot take advanced courses in high school or participate in dual-enrollment community college (Whiteside, 2021). As a population, FGCS are less likely than their continuing generation peers to take Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credits while in high school (Cataldi et al., 2018). When FGCS received support from their mentors and teachers, they were more likely to enroll in higher education, but that support was inconsistent, and with a noticeable difference between how high school teachers and administrators treated them when they asked for assistance versus when continuing-generation college students asked for help (Minicozzi & Roda, 2020; Whiteside, 2021). First-generation college students benefit from high school teachers and counselors who encourage college preparatory courses and provide knowledge of the college environment, resources, and culture (Cole, 2021; Tsai et al., 2022). Faculty

understanding FGCS experiences and viewing their academic ability from a deficit significantly impact their academic success, denying an equitable educational experience (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008).

In 2007, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released the *College Learning for the New Global Century* report to guide institutional practices that increase the quality of student learning, increase persistence to graduation, and prepare the graduate for the twenty-first century. The report presented four essential learning outcomes for contemporary education (see Appendix D): "knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning" (Association of American Colleges and Universities & National Leadership Council (U.S.), 2007, p. 12). Guiding the path to excellence, the AACU presented seven Principles of Excellence (see Appendix E). The principles collectively presented a comprehensive view of education that attends to teaching, learning, and fostering civic engagement (Association of American Colleges and Universities & National Leadership Council (U.S.), 2007).

The AACU (2007) stated, "in a democratic society, the goal must be to extend opportunity and excellence to everyone, and not just to a fortunate minority" (p. 17). The AACU also recognized the American higher education system's failings and inability to fulfill the "promise of democracy because this society has never before attempted to provide a liberating education for all Americans" (p. 50). Based on Kuh's (2008) research from the National Student of Student Engagement (NSSE), the AACU promoted high impact practices (HIPs) that foster success for traditionally underserved student populations (Association of American Colleges and Universities & National Leadership Council (U.S.), 2007). The effectiveness of HIPs is demonstrated through an increased sense of belonging and self-efficacy, higher first to second-

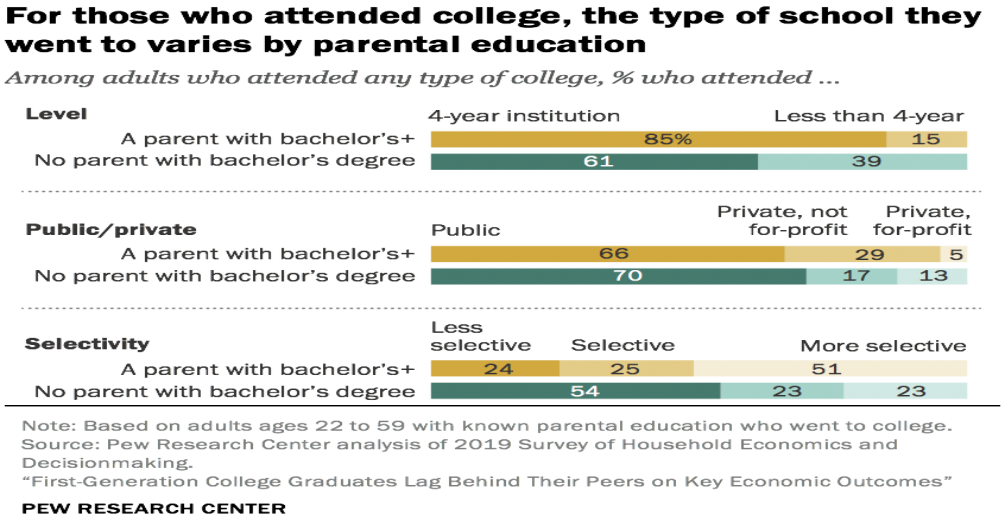
year retention rates, and persistence to graduation (Finley & McNair, 2013; S. R. Johnson & Stage, 2018; Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Roldan et al., 2020).

Institutional Selectivity and Matching

The selectivity of an institution, or the perceived ability of the institution's students, is often used to determine an institution's academic reputation (Astin & Henson, 1977; Pascarella et al., 2006). Studies have explored the correlation between the selectivity of an institution and the rate of degree completion, finding that the selectivity of an institution correlates to higher degree completion rates, especially for high-achieving, low-income students (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Cook, 2022; Melguizo, 2008; Ruiz Alvarado et al., 2020). However, students from lower economic backgrounds, FGCS, and students of color are less likely to attend selective institutions even though their academic profile matches with more selective institutions. See Figure 5) (Holland, 2020; Kang & García Torres, 2021; L. Nichols & Valle, 2019; Ovink et al., 2018).

Figure 5

Institution Attendance by Selectivity



Note. Included with permission. See Appendix Q. (Fry, 2021)

When a student's academic profile matches a more selective institution, but they attend a less selective institution, they are undermatched (Cook, 2022; Kang & García Torres, 2021; L. Nichols & Valle, 2019; Ovink et al., 2018; J. Smith et al., 2013). Students with lower socioeconomic status (SES) undermatch at a higher rate than students with a higher SES (Belasco & Trivette, 2015; Kang & García Torres, 2021; J. Smith et al., 2013). First-generation college students often undermatch than their continuing-generation peers (Holland, 2020; Redford & Hoyer, 2018). The prevalence of FGCS undermatching is due, primarily, to their lack of resources when it comes to the college search process (Holland, 2020; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Thus, the idea of "choice" is problematic, as it implies that students have the privilege and resources to select the institution that is a good match for them (Iloh, 2018, 2019). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed the most recognized and widely used model for college choice. Their seminal linear model describes the college search process in three states: predisposition, search, and choice. The first phase is the student's decision to attend college; the second phase identifies institutions for consideration. Finally, the third phase, choice, is the point at which the student evaluates the institutions and selects their school (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). For first-generation college students, the disjointed movement through the phases is affected by their knowledge of the search process, academic preparedness, and available financial resources (Hebert, 2017).

Family connections and obligations affect a student's decision to choose a less selective institution over a more appropriately matched institution (Holland, 2020; Kang & García Torres, 2021; Ovink et al., 2018). When students undermatch, the consequences are evident during their college experience and beyond (Kang & García Torres, 2021; L. Nichols & Valle, 2019; Ovink et al., 2018; J. Smith et al., 2013). Undermatched students are more likely to leave college before

attaining a degree. For those who earn a degree, their earnings are lower than those who attended a more selective institution (Cook, 2022; Kang & García Torres, 2021; Ovink et al., 2018). The inability to develop their intellectual potential and to integrate academically influences undermatched students' decision to drop out (Muskens et al., 2019).

Students may also face a cultural mismatch when their values and experiences conflict with institutional values and cultures (Hecht et al., 2021). Many first-generation college students come from families or communities with cultural norms that value interdependence, not independence (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Hecht et al., 2021; Kiyama & Harper, 2018). The conflict arises when their chosen institution's values and practices reinforce independence, effectively marginalizing the students (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Hecht et al., 2021). A family's social and cultural capital influence the prevalence of an undermatch or mismatch, which institutions could mitigate by developing family engagement opportunities (Harper et al., 2020; Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Roksa & Deutschlander, 2018).

Attrition, Retention, and Persistence

The retention and persistence of FGCS are affected by their sense of engagement and connection to their university community, their ability to meet financial responsibilities, family support, and academic performance (E. M. Brown et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020; Pratt et al., 2019). Developing relationships with peers and faculty also positively impacted their persistence with out-of-classroom experiences connecting them to faculty, peers, and support resources, thereby increasing their sense of connection to the institution (Hopkins et al., 2021).

Compared to 74% of their continuing generation peers, only 56% of FGCS were still enrolled or received a degree after six years (Cataldi et al., 2018). First-generation college students are also more likely to drop out in the second year and leave school within three years at

twice the rate of continuing-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018). Students report that their responsibilities of having a job while taking care of their families and attending school lead to less time they can spend on academic work, connecting with peers, or receiving academic assistance (R. Evans et al., 2020; Glaessgen et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 2019). The effect of not attaining their degree means they are limited in their career opportunities and must pay off student loans while earning half of what a person with a bachelor's degree earns (Breitwieser et al., 2017).

Strengths

The discussion about FGCS significantly comes from a deficit point of view; however, the strengths of FGCS cannot be overlooked (Havlik et al., 2020). Deficit thinking positions a person or group as lacking a desired quality and can perpetuate educational inequity through stereotypes (Smit, 2012; Tewell, 2020). Smit strongly emphasized the harm of deficit thinking (2012):

> One of the most serious effect of deficit thinking is that it strengthens stereotypes in the minds and thoughts of educators, policy makers and students themselves. In essence, deficit thinking allows generalizations about student ability to be made and supports a laziness to grapple with the complex issues around student difficulties. In the process, people who are already disenfranchised are labelled and further stigmatized. (p.372)

Disrupting the deficit approach with a strengths-based approach has proven effective for FGCS student success (Clifton, 2017; Soria et al., 2017; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015). Despite the challenges faced by the students, FGCS can persist because they know getting an education is part of the greater good, and getting a degree would help their families and honor them for the sacrifices made to keep their students in college. Additionally, their character strengths, a strong sense of self, and the ability to form beneficial supportive relationships help them reach graduation (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020). Strengths-based development focuses

on identifying, developing, and using personal assets to address life's challenges (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Reframing the discussion and approach to FGCS from a deficit model to focus on their strengths validates their experiences to encourage and promote student success (E. M. Brown et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020).

Sense of Belonging

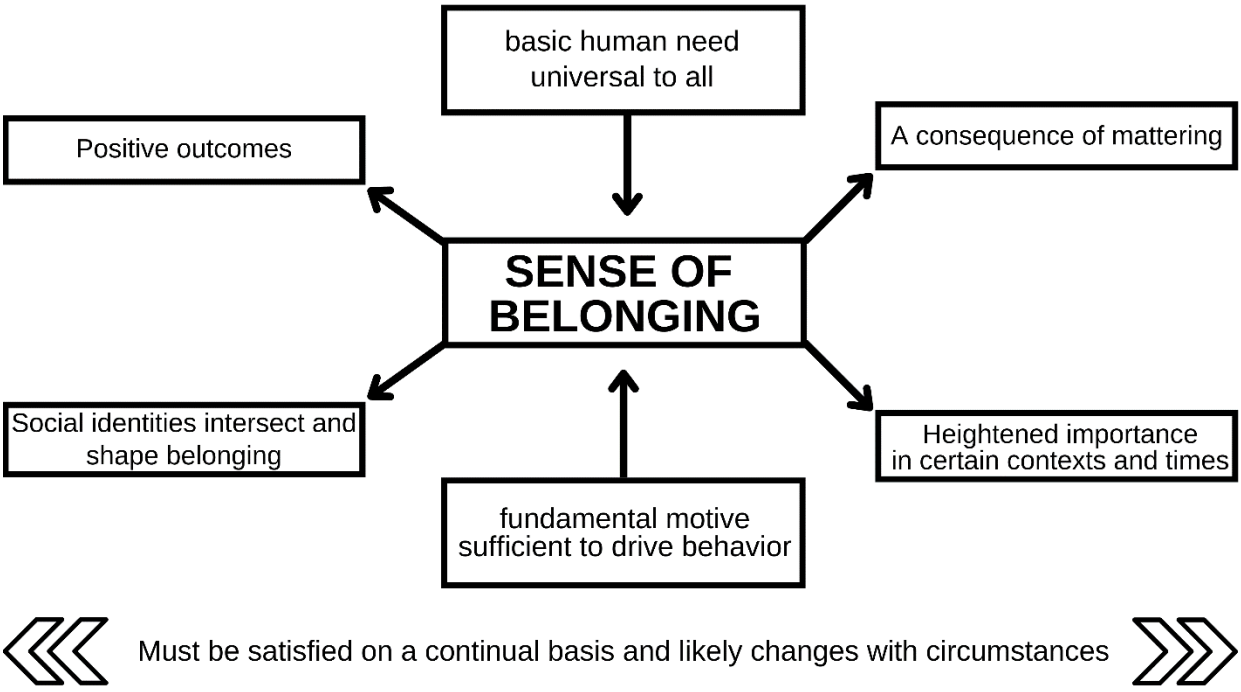
Examining well-being and a sense of belonging as developed and constructed over time provides valuable information and insight for developmental programming and interventions (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019). Strayhorn (2019) defines a sense of belonging as "a basic human need, and fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior" (p. 16). Strayhorn based his definition on the foundational work of Abraham Maslow, who identifies belonging as a universal human need (Maslow, 1970). Many definitions of a sense of belonging are found in the literature that all gesture to a person's need to feel needed and matter (Russell & Jarvis, 2019; Strayhorn, 2019). Though a sense of belonging can depend on context and vary over time, for college students, it leads to positive student behavior, including social connectedness, academic preparedness, and increased university community involvement (Bauman et al., 2019; Bowman et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2020). See Figure 6 for a visual representation of Strayhorn's core elements of a sense of belonging.

Extracurricular involvement, exercising, and studying increases a sense of belonging, while, unsurprisingly, time spent on social media negatively impacts a sense of belonging (Bowman et al., 2019). Additionally, students who experienced good relationships with their parents reported a higher level of well-being. When students spent time with their friends, it also predicted higher emotional well-being levels. Visiting a faculty member is generally thought to be a positive activity; however, when a student visits a faculty member's office more than once,

it is associated with lower levels of well-being. Interactions with faculty because of the student's lower academic performance could explain the lower levels of well-being (Bowman et al., 2019).

Figure 6

Core Elements of Sense of Belonging



Note. The needs and outcomes of a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2021)

Faculty and student success professionals can anticipate when students need more support and work to diminish the effects of experiences that negatively impact the student (Bowman et al., 2019). Brooms (2019) identified three main themes which contributed to an increased sense of belonging at college: 1) a supportive and challenging culture, 2) relationships with faculty and staff, and 3) student motivation and determination to achieve success.

Means and Pyne (2017) examined how institutional support structures affect students' sense of belonging. They examined institutional structures designed to increase a student's sense of belonging, such as need-based scholarship programs, social identity-based student

organizations, communities within the residence halls, faculty, academic support services, and high-impact practices. A crucial finding of this study identified that a sense of belonging begins before a student enters college, and, an echo from other studies, belonging is contextual and fluctuates. This finding of the contextualization of belonging is consistent with the results of Vaccaro and Newman (2016). Literature has shown that community participation, like in honors, positively affects students' sense of belonging and provides additional personal and academic benefits (Bott-Knutson et al., 2020).

The positive effects of a sense of belonging are well documented and benefit students. However, a balanced look at students' sense of belonging must include the negative consequences that occur when a student does not feel part of their university community. Students who lack a sense of belonging are more likely to have lower grades and leave before graduation (Azmitia et al., 2018; Kuh, G. D. et al., 2006; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Underrepresented student populations who experience a hostile and unresponsive campus environment increased their feelings of otherness, contributing to a sense of unbelonging (Museus et al., 2018). First-generation college students may also have other marginalized, intersecting identities that complicate the development of a sense of belonging (Salusky et al., 2022). For example, students of color report that their ability to make and cultivate friendships with their peers positively and negatively affects their sense of belonging (Salusky et al., 2022). When in spaces with others who share similar underrepresented identities, FGCS find a sense of comfort, which enhances their sense of belonging; however, white FGCS do not find it necessary to seek identity-based relationships to increase their sense of belonging (Salusky et al., 2022). Noting how a sense of belonging is developed and felt between white and non-white FGCS is integral to supporting all FGCS.

Social class also affects how a student develops and feels a sense of belonging, with students from working-class families not benefiting from institutional structures as much as middle and upper-class students that cultivate belonging (Bettencourt, 2021). Institutionally undermatched FGCS struggle to find where they belong (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2020; Muskens et al., 2019). To increase their sense of belonging, undermatched students at less selective institutions should consider honors participation to find their academic community (Diaz et al., 2019).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one's belief that one can engage in a behavior or accomplish an action (Bandura, 1986; Betz & Hackett, 1987). The roots of academic self-efficacy arise from Bandura's seminal work in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). The decision to engage in goal attainment is made by examining one's self-efficacy regarding the tasks necessary to attain their goal and what they believe the outcome will be when they make their attempt (S. D. Brown & Lent, 2013). Outcome expectations are what a person expects to occur due to behavior (S. D. Brown & Lent, 2013). A person's expectation regarding outcomes is influenced by personal experience or observation of other people's outcomes (Lent et al., 1996). The self-efficacy of FGCS and GCS predict academic outcomes—the higher the academic self-efficacy, the better the academic outcomes (Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2022).

However, self-efficacy is not fixed; if necessary, intervention may succeed in raising it. Successful intervention includes examining past performance, addressing unrealistic outcome expectations, and creating opportunities for vicarious learning such as mentorships, social

persuasion (encouragement from others), and anxiety reduction (Bandura, 1986; Hackett, 2013; Lent et al., 1996). There are limitations to successfully implementing an intervention, such as when a person's skills are deficient and need remediation. In such an instance, the focus should be on skills attainment rather than goal attainment (Lent et al., 1996).

Self-efficacy and a sense of belonging are interconnected and when increased lead to beneficial behaviors. First-generation students experienced a greater sense of belonging when they also experienced positive emotional and behavioral engagements. Specifically, first-generation students who consistently attended and participated in class increased their academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019). However, attending and engaging in class did not affect academic self-efficacy or the sense of belonging of continuing generation students. When first-generation students and continuing-generation students experience a sense of belonging, it minimizes procrastination. The relationship between a sense of belonging and procrastination deserves closer examination. The finding that links procrastination with maladaptive perfectionism and executive functioning may not be significant, but it still adds context to behaviors that affect academic success (Ganske & Ashby, 2007; Rinaldi et al., 2021).

Holdsworth et al. (2018) sought to understand how students defined resilience, developed resilience strategies, and identified how the university supported the development of resilience. University students will face self-doubt, stress, and low self-efficacy during their educational careers, and their ability to overcome and overcome those challenges is essential to their success. Resilience is their "ability to adjust to stressful and adverse circumstances" (Holdsworth et al., 2018, p. 1838). Both internal and external factors affect how a student reacts to those adverse circumstances, and the university can and should support the development of dynamic resilience.

Impostor Phenomenon (Imposter Syndrome) and Perfectionism

The term “impostor phenomenon” was first coined by Clance and Imes (1978) in their research on women with doctoral degrees. Though they had found considerable educational and professional recognition and success, the women credited luck, timing, charm, or low standards rather than believing in their own intelligence or abilities (Clance & Imes, 1978; Holden et al., 2021). Not owning their intellectual successes resulted from the influence of their families—the family believed they were intelligent, so they must continue to achieve lest the family thinks differently, or the women continued to achieve to prove they were just as bright as someone else in the family (Clance & Imes, 1978). First-generation college students believe themselves to be imposters when they presume their achievements were not earned or their presence at college was a mistake (Ramsey & Brown, 2018).

A highly competitive classroom environment increased adverse course outcomes and feelings of being an imposter, more so for FGCS than CG (Canning et al., 2020). However, Holden et al. (2021) found no significant difference between FGCS and CG, comparing their levels of imposter syndrome using the Imposterism Scale, but it would not serve FGCS or CG well to believe one study over the other, as data collection occurred in different contexts. Canning et al. (2020) participants were first- or second-year students enrolled in one of forty-eight STEM courses offered at a large midwestern university, while Holden et al. (2021) randomly sampled participants from a southeastern university.

Studies have explored the link between the impostor phenomenon and perfectionism (Holden et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Holden et al. (2021) found that imposter syndrome was similar between FGCS and CG as socially prescribed perfectionism; however, the stress levels were higher for FGCS than CG. With no prevailing definition,

perfectionism is best described as overly critical of self with high and unrealistic expectations (Frost et al., 1990; Grugan et al., 2021; Woodfin et al., 2020). The literature on multidimensional perfectionism has its roots in the work of D. E. Hamacheck, who first posited the ideas of normal and neurotic perfectionism (Ganske & Ashby, 2007; Kamushadze et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021). Frost et al. (1993) replaced the terms normal and neurotic with adaptive and maladaptive, respectively. An adaptive perfectionist is an individual who sets high standards and when performance falls short of expectations, they are satisfied with their performance but still strive to "maximize their capabilities" (Andrews et al., 2014; Ganske & Ashby, 2007, p. 18). Maladaptive perfectionists are not as flexible, judge themselves more harshly, and do not have realistic expectations or concepts (Andrews et al., 2014; Ganske & Ashby, 2007).

Hewitt and Flett (1991) expanded on perfectionism research and separated it into three components: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed. The self-oriented perfectionist set high standards for themselves and is very critical of their performance; the other-oriented perfectionist place exacting standards on the people in their life, and the socially prescribed perfectionist believe other people have high and exacting standards that they must meet (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Neumeister, 2004b). A recent line of meta-analytic research has established that all orientations of perfectionism (self, socially, and other) are increasing in college populations (Curran & Hill, 2019). Curran and Hill (2019) contend that the rise is due to competitiveness, perceived external pressure, and self-esteem protection by projecting high standards onto others.

Adaptive perfectionism (self-oriented) has positive effects on students, such as increased life satisfaction, more robust coping strategies, and positive family relationships; however, of concern are the adverse effects of maladaptive perfectionism (socially and other-oriented) of lower emotional well-being and higher levels of stress and depression (Suh et al., 2019).

Perfectionism connects with self-esteem and self-critical rumination (Fearn et al., 2022; Kolubinski et al., 2016).

Social and Cultural Capital

Social capital refers to the resources available to someone by creating and cultivating relationships and networks that foster cooperation and includes their skills and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986; Riley, 2019). Social capital has a positive effect on academic success. Students who have built networks or know of the resources available to assist them in college increase college persistence more often, benefitting CG more than FGCS (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). First-generation students come to college with limited knowledge and access to the resources necessary to build social capital (Glass, 2023; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). First-generation students are also less likely to establish faculty connections and seek help (Schwartz et al., 2018). However, FGCS receive an increased benefit over their CG peers in building social capital when engaging in extracurricular activities (Almeida et al., 2021).

Connecting with faculty and staff helps students establish new connections that provide additional internships or job and career advice opportunities (Martin et al., 2020; McCallen & Johnson, 2020). Programs and opportunities to assist first-generation college students in increasing their social capital have proven effective, but not all FGCS can participate in the activities necessary to develop and cultivate social capital (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). If FGCS cannot participate in extracurricular activities due to family or work obligations, their participation in their majors, academic support programs, or living communities is essential to helping them grow their social capital and networks (Martin et al., 2020). First-generation college students who do not develop connections to the campus community from which they can seek assistance perceive adverse outcomes for their future (Ma & Shea, 2021).

Social capital benefits students beyond the university by providing them with the tools to succeed in other environments (Schwartz et al., 2018). Honors students build and increase their social capital through faculty discussions and seek advice concerning their major and career goals (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). Their discussions often move beyond the classroom, as honors students are more likely to engage in social, political, or world events with their peers outside of class (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Rinn & Plucker, 2019). The existing literature emphasizes the importance of social capital for FGCS, though they also benefit from the other types of capital they bring to university (Mishra, 2020; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) identified familial, aspirational, and linguistic capital as assets that built cultural wealth for socially marginalized groups. Leveraging the sources of capital abundant in FGCS positively affects cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

In higher education, cultural capital refers to the familiarity and knowledge gained from family and social interactions to access and navigate institutional structures (Meehan & Howells, 2019; Richards, 2022). Cultural capital contributes to the successful transition to college; without a clear understanding of how it affects the experience of FGCS, it leads to continued educational inequities (Richards, 2022). The challenge of cultural capital for FGCS is evident in their college choice, specifically the frequency of undermatching (Deutschlander, 2017). Through the introduction and participation in activities that build knowledge and familiarity with colleges, families build the capital to assist their students in deciding which institution is the best fit (Deutschlander, 2017; Muskens et al., 2019; Ovink et al., 2018). Less selective institutions can address their students who are undermatched by offering academic opportunities that lead to persistence and degree attainment, such as honors (Diaz et al., 2019; Gansemer-Topf et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Just as the number of honors programs and colleges has flourished within American higher education, so has the number of first-generation college students (Cognard-Black, 2017; Whitely et al., 2018). Honors is transforming from a place meant only for the best and brightest to a place of inclusivity; however, honors has considerable growth ahead as it redefines honors education to meet the needs of twenty-first-century students (Badenhausen et al., 2020; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021). Increasing the use of HIPs elevates the educational experience and opportunity for all students and reduces the stigmatization and marginalization of FGCS by creating equity for future prosperity (Kuh, 2008). Additionally, the status quo of viewing FGCS through a deficit lens must stop to allow students to flourish and attain their personal, educational, and professional goals (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Psychometricians try to measure it.

Experimentalists try to control it.

Interviewers ask questions about it.

Observers watch it.

Participant observers do it.

Statisticians count it.

Evaluators value it.

Qualitative inquirers find meaning it.

Halcolm's Laws of Inquiry (M. Q. Patton, 2002)

Introduction

This study examines the lived experience of first-generation college students participating in honors. The absence of research focused on the lived experiences of FGCS in honors drove the focus and completion of this study. Between 2000 and 2019, the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors (JNCHC) published 522 articles, averaging 26 total articles per year (Walshe, 2020). An online search of the JNCHC yielded one 2018 article which discussed the characteristics of first-generation and low-income students that may affect their participation in honors. Mead (2018) relied on quantitative data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the NCHS to support the inclusion of FCGS and low-income students in honors. With the statistical data collected by the NCES and NCHC, the results of this study will provide honors professionals a greater understanding of FGCS in honors, as statistical data is only one part of understanding experiences of FGCS.

When determining the appropriate method for research, Patton (2002) suggests answering the following questions:

> "1. What are the purposes of the inquiry?"
> "2. Who are the primary audiences for the findings?"
> "3. What questions will guide the inquiry?"
> "4. What data will answer or illuminate the inquiry questions?"
> "5. What resources are available to support the inquiry?"
> "6. What criteria will be used to judge the quality of the findings?" (p. 13).

The benefit of qualitative research is that it produces a wealth of information from a small sample (M. Q. Patton, 2002). Using Patton's guiding questions allows the researcher to design a methodology that most appropriately answers the research questions while providing a clear path from data collection to data reporting (M. Q. Patton, 2002). Merriam (2002) identified three hallmark characteristics of qualitative research designs: they are 1) seeking to understand the constructed meaning of participants' experiences, 2) the researcher is the instrument, and 3) the outcome of the research is highly descriptive.

The researcher used Patton's guiding questions to evaluate and determine the most suitable research approach for this study. The most commonly known qualitative research methodologies are grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and narrative inquiry (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After the evaluative process and dismissing the initial method of phenomenology, the narrative inquiry approach was selected, as it provided the ability to richly describe the lived experiences of FGCS in honors through examining their stories. Narrative inquiry empowers people to voice their experiences by allowing the unknown to become known, revealing their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Mishler, 1986; O'Grady et al., 2018; Riessman, 2008). Through storytelling, participants are encouraged to share their experiences while providing the context for others to understand (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2006). A foundational tenant of narrative inquiry is the

researcher's relationship with the research subject through a mutual learning process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Qualitative study through narrative inquiry allows the researcher to "reveal deep understandings about human interaction" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 16) and move away from the sterility of numbers. Narrative researchers acknowledge and accept that study of the particular displaces generalizability (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The concept of validity as a way to know is replaced by a "desire to understand" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 30).

The researchers interviewed six students via Zoom, recorded the sessions, transcribed the data, and then shared the themes with the participants for verification. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation students participating in university honors programs or colleges?
2. How has the honors experience shaped and influenced the college experience outside of honors in first-generation honors students?
3. How do first-generation students experience a sense of belonging and self-efficacy in and through their honors education?

Research Design

Understanding why students stay and why they depart is not the whole issue when discussing students' retention and persistence; how they develop the proficiencies that lead to persistence is part of the formula (Astin, 1984). The term "student development" is ubiquitously used by student affairs/student success professionals to frame their professional practice with students. One determinative definition of "student development" does not exist; however, the definitions put forth by Sanford (1967), Rodgers (1990), and Jones and Abes (2013) all recognize that student development involves change (L. D. Patton et al., 2016). Student

development theory guides student development practice. The works of Erickson, Piaget, and Lewin are the genesis of student development theory (L. D. Patton et al., 2016). In 1936, eminent psychologist Kurt Lewin presented an equation to describe behavior, $B = f(P, E)$, or behavior is a function of the person and their environment (Lewin, 1936). Lewin's behavior equation provided the foundation for the development theories of Chickering, Perry, and Kohlberg, which became the early foundation upon which student affairs professionals built their practice (L. D. Patton et al., 2016).

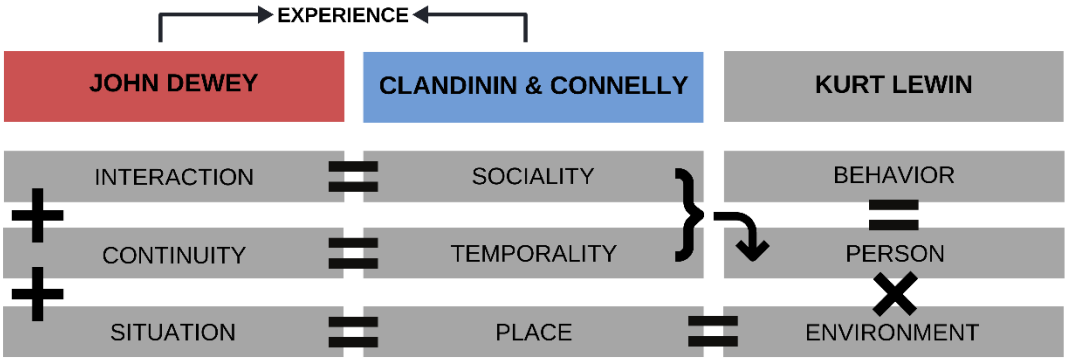
John Dewey's theory of experience has influenced teaching and learning and the research methodology chosen for this research. Dewey (Dewey & Hinchey, 2018) wrote, "Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession" (p. 18). The experiences of FGCS in honors are communicated, analyzed, and shared using narrative inquiry as the methodology. Narrative inquiry is both a way of understanding experience and a research method (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The philosophical foundation of narrative inquiry is found in Dewey's Theory of Experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hutchinson, 2015). The predicates of Dewey's theory are continuity and interaction (Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015). Continuity is the concept that past and current experiences influence one another, affecting future experiences, and interaction is the bearing of the current situation on experience (Hutchinson, 2015).

Using Dewey's criteria of continuity and interaction, Clandinin (2000, 2006) defined narrative inquiry as a collaborative approach to understanding human experience. Clandinin (2000), Lewin's behavior equation (1936), and Dewey's (1938) theory of experience influenced the study's research approach to narrative inquiry. Lewin's (1936) research is considered the foundation of action research; however, his behavior equation has a natural connection to

Clandinin's concept of experience and narrative inquiry. Contemporaries of one another, Lewin's (1936) and Dewey's (1938) works did not directly influence each other; however, when viewed through a modern lens of student development, connections could be drawn between the theory of experience and the behavior equation and their influence on narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2000; Colucci & Colombo, 2018). See Figure 7 for a visual description of the connections between Clandinin (2000), Lewin (1936), and Dewey (1938).

Figure 7

Narrative Inquiry Lewin Connection



Note. (Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938; Hutchinson, 2015; Lewin, 1936; Mayer, 2015)

Using Dewey as their foundation, Clandinin (Caine et al., 2013; 2000) developed a three-dimensional conceptualization of experience: 1) personal and social (sociality), 2) past, present, and future (temporal), and 3) situation (place). Temporality is how past, present, and future experiences shape each other (Caine et al., 2013; Haydon et al., 2018; Kruse, 2011). A situation is the "interaction of internal and external conditions," which cannot be separated from each other (Hutchinson, 2015, p. 9). Sociality refers to the interactions one has with other members of their society or community (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2000; Hutchinson, 2015). The three dimensions work in concert to shape the reality of experience (Clandinin, 2006).

As the inquirer explores the narrative of the participants' experiences, they are not passive and may begin the exploration of the participant narrative with a narrative of their own (Clandinin, 2006). The relationship between the researcher and the participants is crucial to the success of a narrative inquiry-based study (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) stated, "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only in individuals' experiences but on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (pp. 42–43). As a collaborative process, the narrative researcher's story plot is revised and restoried as the points of importance are identified (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The researcher's ethical responsibility in narrative inquiry is to safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of the participants and be mindful of participant vulnerability (Josselson, 2007).

This research uses narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of FGCS in honors through the gathering and retelling of their narratives. Data collected to achieve the research goals of this project followed a systematic research process and procedure as identified by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). The user of narrative research searches for understanding and representation of experiences of FGCS in honors. The objective is to explore how first-generation students experience honors, translate or apply those experiences outside of honors, and feel, develop, and cultivate self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and social capital. The extant literature on honors and FGCS is nearly non-existent, presenting difficulties when developing best practices for recruiting, academic integration, social integration, retention, and persistence to graduation of FGCS in honors. This dearth of knowledge to improve the experiences of FGCS in

honors led to the identification that honors as a professional discipline has ignored a significant college-bound and college-going population. The research questions were developed to gather the experiences of FGCS in honors.

Participants

An application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of Northwest Nazarene University with permission to gather data granted on April 19, 2022 (see Appendix F). A snowball sampling approach was used to recruit participants from United States honors colleges and programs; however, the approach yielded only one participant. Snowball sampling uses participant networks and referrals to identify additional participants (Parker et al., 2019). Social media posts on group pages and message boards for honors and first-generation college students were made (See Appendix G). Emails were sent to higher education colleagues requesting help in recruitment (See Appendix H). Letter versions of the recruitment email with recruitment posters were hand-delivered to honors professionals at the November 2022 National Collegiate Honors Council meeting in Dallas, Texas.

For inclusion in the study, the participants had to be: 1) currently enrolled in the honors program or college at a four-year institution; 2) have completed at least one year (two semesters or three quarters) of college, and 3) be FCGS using the Glaessgen et al. (2018) definition of an undergraduate student whose parents did not complete a four-year degree. The intention was to exclude students who were enrolled in honors and began in the fall of 2022, as their inexperience with honors would not compare to a student who had completed one or more years. The participants were sophomore year or above, making the exclusion unnecessary. The potential participants were to be put in a pool and then selected to reflect the demographics of students participating in honors and FGCS (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). The study

participants were majority female and from an underrepresented group in honors. The researcher interviewed all contacted students.

Communication with potential participants followed a script to ensure consistency of information and screen for inclusion or exclusion from the study (See Appendix I). The participants included five women and one man. Demographic information requested of the participants included major, class standing (number of credits completed), name of honors college or program, socioeconomic status using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status, geographical location, household members, and racial/ethnic background. The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social uses an illustration of a ladder to capture a person's perception of their social standing—at the top of the ladder are those with the best jobs, have money, and the most education, and at the bottom is the ladder are those with the worst jobs, little money, and little to no education (Adler et al., 2000; Giatti et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2021). All participants digitally signed the required Informed Consent form, including the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix J), and the forms were downloaded and stored electronically, accessible only to the researcher. Each participant consented to the audio and video recording of the interview.

The research and interview questions were sent to five higher education professionals and an honors alumnus to determine their validity in answering the research questions. The professionals included an executive director of an honors college, two honors college faculty members, an academic advisor, and an Assistant Vice Chancellor/Dean of Students. Upon receipt of the face validity results, a pilot study was conducted before formal data collection began. Conducting a pilot study allowed refinement of the research process elements—interview protocol, interview questions, and analytical processes (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The interview questions were constructed and reviewed to provide maximum clarity and encourage meaningful

narratives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The pilot study allowed the researcher to test the efficacy of the question construction and delivery of the question to the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After finishing the pilot interviews, the participants provided feedback on the questions and the interview skills of the researcher. The pilot study participants completed an anonymous online feedback form (see Appendix K). As the researcher drew the participants familiar with them through a convenience sample at a regional comprehensive institution, the survey was not delivered until after completing all the pilot interviews. The outside committee member disseminated the pilot study survey, collated the responses, and sent them to the researcher. Waiting until all the interviews were completed to distribute the anonymous survey was a way to recognize and mitigate the effects of the power differential between the research and the pilot participants in providing a critique (Martin-Thomsen et al., 2021). See Appendix L for the minor changes to the interview protocol based on the pilot study.

Reflexivity is crucial to the qualitative research process, as it allows what may be unknown to become known, addressing subjectivity, so it does not negatively impact data analysis (Barrett et al., 2020; E. B. Smith & Luke, 2021). The pilot study allowed researcher bias and positionality to be acknowledged and addressed. During each pilot interview, the researcher noted when participant comments brought forth subjective judgments—immediately following the interview; the notes were reviewed and explored, attempting to identify the reasons behind the researcher's response to the participant's narratives (Dodgson, 2019). The reflexive practices used in the pilot study were discussed and reviewed with the outside committee member. The pilot study feedback was to be more mindful of facial expressions when listening to participant responses. The expressions were unintentional as the researcher attempted to listen and scan the

questions, as some future questions were answered earlier in the interview than anticipated. The questions were also enlarged on the screen to limit unintended facial expressions. The pilot study improved the quality of the instrument to elicit quality data to answer the research questions.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually (See Appendix M). Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to express their experiences openly and freely (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The semi-structured approach also allows for asking follow-up, clarifying, or changing questions as data collection proceeds (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Peoples, 2021). Interviews allow the researcher to ask questions that elicit the information necessary to answer the research questions. Therefore, the instrument is the researcher.

A narrative inquiry interview encourages the participants to share significant life events and contexts (Mishler, 1986; Muylaert et al., 2014; Scheffelaar et al., 2021). Arising from their research within the social-health field, Artioli et al. (2019) offered six elements of an effective narrative interview:

1. To know how to choose the right setting;
2. To know the basics of effective communication;
3. To use communication facilitation strategies;
4. To know how to formulate open questions;
5. To know how to put in place the active listening to the patient and his point of view;
6. The understanding of ‘being’ in a difficult relationship. (p.10)

Research arising from the healthcare field, providing appropriate guidance of employing narrative inquiry interview techniques is salient in that the populations under study are vulnerable, much like FGCS are within the higher education context. Scheffelaar et al. (2021), in their research with older adults in long-term care, identified design principles for narrative interviewing echoing the elements of Artioli et al. (2019), such as careful construction of open-ended questions which allow eliciting “detailed and particular stories” (p.10) and the essential

nature of the researcher's listening skills. Within the context of this research, certain elements identified by Artioli et al. (2019) were not in the researcher's control, such as choosing the setting. The researcher gently encouraged the participants to consider the setting from which they would join the virtual interview. It was important for the participants to feel comfortable in their space to be free to speak openly about their experiences.

The "gold standard" of qualitative research has long been face-to-face interviews, with extensive research backing its efficacy, while using video to conduct virtual interviews is nascent (Krouwel et al., 2019; Oliffe et al., 2021). The benefit of using a virtual platform to conduct the interviews saved time and money with no incurred travel costs, and multiple interviews with people in different geographical locations were able to occur—that would not have been possible in a traditional face-to-face modality (Krouwel et al., 2019; Oliffe et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). A study comparing face-to-face and virtual interviews revealed very little difference in the interview quality and responses (Krouwel et al., 2019). Subtle body language and facial cues are lost if the video quality is subpar in a virtual environment (Oliffe et al., 2021). Additionally, poor network connectivity disrupts the interview flow as the researcher and participant wait for the connection to improve (Oliffe et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the benefits and convenience of using an online platform to conduct virtual interviews outweighed the challenges posed by the modality.

The researcher designed the interview questions to fully frame the participants' experience in honors within the context of narrative inquiry by eliciting narratives that best captured their experiences. The order of the questions was crafted to reflect on their high school to university honors experience chronologically by first asking about high school experiences, the decision to attend college, the honors application and admissions process, their honors

classroom experiences, and their overall university experience. The goal was to reduce the time necessary to chronologically restory the narratives to assist in data analysis. The restorying process includes "developing a plot-what the story is about-by linking the data elements into a meaningful whole" (Scheffelaar et al., 2021, p. 8).

At the time of the interview, the participants were all FGCS, currently participating in an honors program or college at a four-year institution in the United States. The researcher did not exclude international students as long as they met the definition of a first-generation college student. If participants withdrew from honors during the study, their data would be excluded. The decision to exclude participants upon withdrawal from honors was to focus on the research questions centered on students currently participating in honors. No participant or data was excluded.

Per the interview protocol, the researcher reviewed the electronically signed consent form before beginning the interview. The researcher completed six interviews. The researcher offered all participants the option of providing a preferred pseudonym and assigned five pseudonyms. The researcher and the transcriptionist knew the names of the participants and their assigned pseudonyms. A spreadsheet was created with the participants' names, pseudonyms, and demographic data and kept in a password-protected file (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher asked the participants the same questions; however, deviations from the scripted questions may have occurred when asking follow-up questions for clarity of meaning. Interviews were recorded using Zoom. The software separates the recordings into audio/visual and audio-only files. Only the audio recordings were uploaded to Dropbox in a file labeled for each participant with their pseudonym. The transcriptionist had permission to access the audio files to prepare the transcripts and upload them when completed. The transcriptionist's permission was

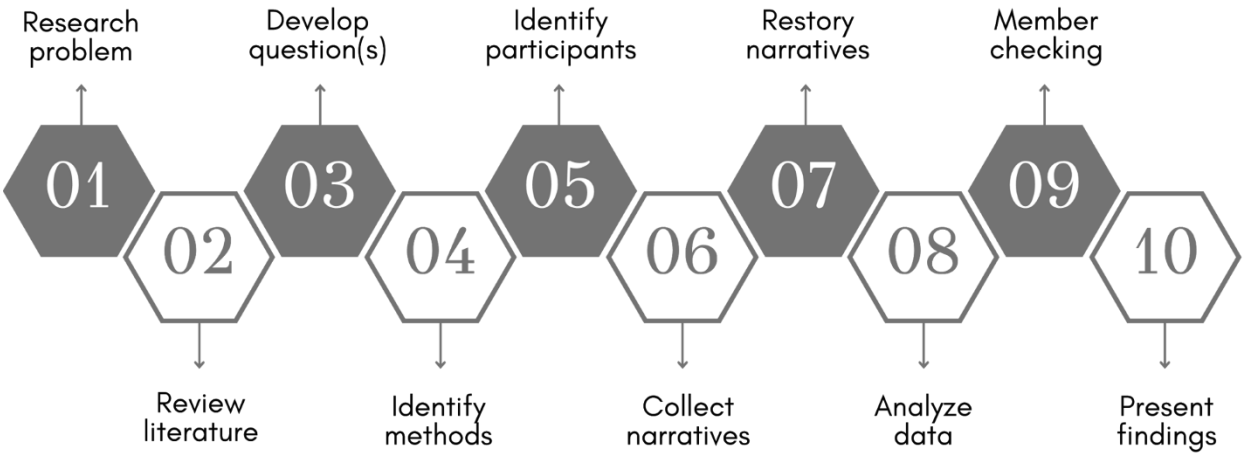
removed upon completion of the transcripts. See Appendix O for the signed confidentiality agreements by the transcription service and the outside committee member.

Analytical Methods

The research process used in conducting this study included the steps identified by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). After identifying a topic, the research process followed ten steps, as shown in Figure 8. Items six and seven specifically relate to the methodology chosen for this study.

Figure 8

Research Process



Note. (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019)

Upon completing the interviews, the researcher had the recordings transcribed by a transcription service. The interview transcripts were hand-coded. Coding is the researcher-generated process using words or phrases to describe data (Saldaña, 2021). Coding underwent multiple iterative cycles to ensure accuracy in the codes, categories, and resultant themes. The first cycle of coding included using both in vivo and eclectic coding. In vivo coding uses the participants' actual language and places them in quotations (Saldaña, 2021). The decision to use

in vivo coding was to maintain the integrity of the participants' voices in the research. In addition to in vivo, eclectic coding was used during the first cycle. Eclectic coding uses the researcher's first impression of the data and identifies a descriptive term (Saldaña, 2021). During the second cycle of coding, the in vivo and eclectic codes were examined and reduced to eliminate redundancies (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Saldaña, 2021). The merged codes identified the themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldaña, 2021).

An inductive coding analysis was employed to derive the codes. Inductive analysis condenses the data and finds the connections between the data and the literature review (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Using inductive analysis allowed the codes to emerge from the participants' narratives rather than predetermined codes and categories. Inductive analysis is the discovery of the data's themes, patterns, and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; O'Kane et al., 2021). The use of member checking ensured validity and reliability. Member checking includes the participants in the analytical phase to ensure accuracy and honesty in the analysis. Each participant was sent an email asking them to review the themes (see Appendix N).

As with the data collection phase during the analysis phases of the study, the researcher used the outside committee member to continue the reflexivity practices during the coding phase of the researcher project. The benefit of the outside committee member's participation in the reflexivity practices assured the integrity of the data analysis and subsequent findings. Using a second coder (outside committee member) to code 10% of the collected data ensures the study's rigor and trustworthiness (Church et al., 2019; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The outside committee member discussed the code, categories, and resulting themes identified through the coding process with the researcher. It was essential not to marginalize the participants' voices and

safeguard their autonomy in sharing their narratives. Identifying and addressing bias, in all forms, ensures the integrity of the data analysis but, more importantly, does not diminish or reduce the impact of the participants' narratives.

Role of the Researcher

The study's researcher is a first-generation college student who experienced many challenges described in the literature review. The researcher stopped-out of college in her senior year. Stopping out is when a student's enrollment in college is interrupted (Gaulke, 2022). The researcher graduated six years later than initially planned and with a different degree than originally sought.

The researcher's connection to honors education is personal and professional. She has worked in honors education for seventeen years and is an associate director of an honors college at a medium-sized regional comprehensive university in the Pacific Northwest. She also has two children with university honors experience: one daughter is a graduate of an honors college at a large research university, and the other daughter is a senior in the honors college where the researcher is employed. The researcher's experience working directly with students has honed their ability to listen to student experiences without interpreting them through the lens of the researcher's life.

Limitations

Limitations are the challenges to the study that may affect the results, such as loss of participants, sample size, researcher bias, and generalizability (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Peoples, 2021). This study examined the experiences of six FGCS in honors at American four-year universities. There are challenges to the generalizability of this study due to the sample size of six. There are thousands of FGCS participating in higher

education, and an unknown amount of FGCS are participating in honors; therefore, it is impossible to conclude that the experiences of those participating in this study are the same for all FGCS in honors. This study only included participants currently participating in honors, not those who have left. The study results could be considered biased in favor of honors by including only current honors students. The researcher's current employment within honors can also speak to a bias in favor of honors. The personal assumptions of the researcher could make it difficult for the reader to conclude the study and subsequent results are free of bias.

Chapter IV

Results

Since language tends to become the chief instrument of learning about many things, let us see how it works

-John Dewey

Introduction

This study explored the experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS) participating in honors programs or colleges at four-year universities in the United States. The multitude of studies on the FGCS experience has provided higher education professionals with a rich and deep understanding of this population (Almeida et al., 2021; Capannola & Johnson, 2022; Conefrey, 2021; Glass, 2023). However, within the scope of study there are very few studies focusing on the FGCS in honors experiences. The gap in the literature about this population led to the three research questions,

1. What are the experiences of first-generation students participating in university honors programs or colleges?
2. How has the honors experience shaped and influenced the college experience outside of honors in first-generation honors students?
3. How do first-generation students experience a sense of belonging and self-efficacy in and through their honors education?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the narratives of the six study participants and the resultant themes found in the participants' stories. The narratives chronicle the pre-college and college experiences of the participants. The narratives and themes present their university experiences explored through their involvement with honors and its effect on their education.

Three themes emerged from the coding process: relationships, academic self-concept, and influences on sense of belonging. The themes and their support from the participant interviews are fully explicated later in this section.

The Participants

Six undergraduate students in honors participated in this study. Each participant completed a short demographic survey to gather their race/ethnicity, gender, whom they lived with before college, class standing, major, social standing, and geographic location (where they lived before college). At the time of the interviews, the six participants attended a four-year university in the United States. Within the narratives, if the participant referred to their institution by name, a pseudonym was used to protect participant anonymity. Three participants attended private institutions, and three attended public institutions. Four participants had junior standing, one sophomore standing, and one senior standing. Half of the participants came from an urban location, two from a rural and one from a remote location. All the participants lived with their families before college; two were adopted by their grandparents, one lived with only one parent, and four lived with both parents. All but one participant had siblings in their homes before college. Half of the participants were White or Caucasian, two were Hispanic or Latino, and one was Black or African American. Only one male participated in the study. The participants reported their socioeconomic status using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status on a scale of one to ten. Three participants placed themselves at five, with the three others at three, four, and six. See Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Name	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Gender**	**Class**	**Major**	**Social status**	**Geographic location**
Alondra	Hispanic/Latino	Female	Sophomore	Nursing	5	Urban
Claire	White/Caucasian	Female	Junior	Apparel Design Merchandising	5	Rural
Brandon	Black/African American	Male	Junior	International Relations	3	Urban
Fiona	Hispanic/Latino	Female	Senior	International Relations	6	Urban
Haley	White/Caucasian	Female	Junior	Biology Chemistry	4	Remote
Shyanne	White/Caucasian	Female	Junior	Nursing	5	Rural

Within this section are brief narratives of each participant to place their experiences chronologically to contextualize those experiences within the research questions. Their accounts were captured through the recorded interviews and restoried to place events in the best chronological order possible.

Alondra

Beginning in sixth grade, Alondra participated in AVID—Advancement Via Individual Determination—to prepare for college. Through AVID, Alondra was encouraged and supported to take honors courses in high school. Her first year of high school was “a little rough,” and she struggled to identify what she wanted; however, she continued to take honors courses. By her second year of high school, she was solidifying her reason and purpose for continuing with advanced courses. Alondra recognized that honors courses in high school would help in college and provide a boost. Her friends also participated in AVID, and she found support in walking the “same path.”

In middle school, she had an idea of where she wanted to go to school. During her first year of high school, she decided to attend a small private, faith-based university in the Midwest to realize her dream to one day become a nurse. There was no question that Alondra would one day attend college because her parents gave her no other choice but to "go to college or you can go to college." Alondra applied to other schools as backup options but was determined to enroll in her first choice. With the expense of university, Alondra believed her parents pushed her even harder to succeed and stay in college.

Alondra's participation in honors was not intentional. She applied for a scholarship, which required first applying to the honors program. Alondra initially regretted her decision to be in honors. After, she took a few courses from the same honors professor, whose teaching style and encouragement bolstered her confidence to do well. Alondra knew that if she could do well in his classes, she could do well in her other classes. The challenge of honors and how it benefitted her academic performance were fully appreciated as she entered her second year. However, it was a process to get to that place. Without parents or siblings to rely on for answers to questions about college or honors, she felt nervous and lost—she did not know the expectations or whom to ask for help. Her position as a first-generation college student was never more present than in classes when her peers seemingly had more knowledge and information about the material, and it was a struggle to understand and catch up.

Alondra did not believe she belonged in honors when she first began because she "wasn't smart enough." In her view, her peers had an advantage, and by comparison, she fell short. Her challenges only pushed her "to do better," and honors encouraged her to find ways to participate and experience more of what college has to offer. Attending university and honors events, she built friendships, and her connections with honors faculty helped build a resource network to get

her questions answered and allay doubts. In her words, “I would recommend it [honors] because it does give you a challenge and it does, for me, it boosts my way of thinking and it kind of has guided me towards the right path.”

Brandon

Originally from West Africa, Brandon came to the United States with his family at 14, settling in the southeastern United States. Brandon's first experience with the American education system was through his placement in English as a Second Language classes. His ESL teacher provided constant support and encouragement through the completion of the classes. Brandon decided to take more advanced classes in high school, which led to his enrollment in International Baccalaureate (IB) courses at his high school. The support he received through his language courses continued when his high school counselor challenged him to continue taking honors courses. Brandon recalls that the courses were “very, very difficult.” However, Brandon did not allow the situation to dissuade him from finding success. He thrived in challenging environments, and the IB courses proved to be the space that allowed him to see his potential.

As a first-generation college student, Brandon felt the weight and pressure of being the first in his family. Brandon's parents wanted him “to go to college, graduate from college, and get a good job.” Not finishing high school or college was not an option for him. Knowing his parents could not guide him regarding academics in high school or college, he relied on the advice of others and used his self-reliance and internal motivation to drive him toward high school completion.

Brandon applied to multiple colleges in or near his home state, and deciding which university he should attend was difficult. Considering the options of staying close to home or moving further away, Brandon's family's behavior strongly influenced his college decision. Since

settling in the southeast, Brandon's family did not “move around a lot,” “travel a lot,” or “do vacations a lot.” He had minimal opportunity to experience other regions of the United States. Going away to college was Brandon's chance to explore and broaden his awareness of other places. He also had the opportunity to have his college education wholly financed, relieving him and his family of the burden of paying for college. His final choice took him to the western United States, with his tuition wholly covered.

Brandon was aware of university honors before he enrolled at his institution. He believed that honors was for students with the highest GPAs and SAT scores, so when he received an email from the honors program, it was unexpected, even though he had performed well in high school. With no formal application process to follow, Brandon went to a social the honors program was hosting to learn more. Wanting to keep challenging himself, and appreciating that honors would push him to strive for more, Brandon enrolled. He had to rely on university counselors to guide him because he “had no idea. . . [he] had to sign up for classes and all that stuff.” In those early days of his college career, it was frustrating to see other students whose parents went to college know what they needed to do, while he was dependent upon the assistance of others.

Initially, Brandon thought his university honors courses would be similar to his high school ones, but he soon discovered they were very different. In his faculty-led discussion courses, he learned to think through an interdisciplinary lens and demonstrated his ability to synthesize information through writing and class participation. However, it took time for Brandon to feel comfortable and confident in his academic abilities, and he occasionally compared his ability to answer questions in class with his peers. As a first-generation college student with English as a second language, Brandon would see his peers as more intellectually

talented than himself because he would respond to in-class discussions simply. Despite his occasional misgivings about his academic performance, Brandon appreciates how honors positively affected his "resilience" and "psychological hardiness." In his words, "You can remember, you can reflect back to how you experienced this type of challenge when you were in college and how you can use that to push yourself forward. So I would definitely recommend the honors program to other students, to first-generation students, yea."

Claire

Spending her formative years in Appalachia, Claire "grew up in a rough childhood," living in poverty. Her biological parents were addicts, and she was removed from her parent's custody and placed with her grandparents before she was a teenager. Around 15, Claire's grandparents, whom she already called "Mom and Dad" adopted her. Claire's high school used pathways to prepare students for college and careers, which she saw as beneficial in readying for a college major. Higher education was a way for her to have something she "could control" for herself. Her parents "worked really hard" and pushed her to earn "good grades" so that she could earn scholarships and attain her educational goals. A couple of high school teachers also encouraged her, but her parents were the main force and influence on her education.

In deciding where to attend college, Claire considered two state universities: one larger and one smaller. She weighed the distance from home and the institutions' sizes to decide. Claire ultimately chose the smaller, regional institution; it was closer to home and felt familiar to her. During the college application process it made sense to her to apply to the honors program with her academic achievements in her high school honors and Advanced Placement courses. The regional institution Claire applied to was non-selective; however, acceptance to the honors program was not guaranteed. The unknown outcome of the honors application process created

nervousness and anxiety that she did not experience when applying to the non-selective university. Even with the unease of the unknown, Claire's frame of mind during the honors application process was that she would be happy if she got in but not devastated if she did not.

Claire began college during COVID, so she did not have the traditional experience of walking into a classroom on the first day of classes. Her classes were on Zoom for the first year and a half, and with no prior college experience, Claire did not know anything different. When her university returned to in-person classes, she was a bit nervous walking into classes, but classes with fewer people made the experience easier to manage. As a first-generation college student, Claire saw a benefit in creating her "own path," and not having to live up to the legacy of alumni parents gave her the freedom to chart her course. Watching other students walk around campus with their parents, who were alumni, was something she wished she could have experienced, but she knew it was not essential to her education.

The faculty within the honors program cultivated an environment in which Claire, as a first-generation college student, felt valued and accepted. From Claire's perspective, the honors program director promoted walking alongside students to help them succeed by offering the support they might not have received in other programs. The opportunities through the honors program allowed Claire to attend a national honors conference, build relationships with other students, and connect with people from diverse backgrounds. The educational benefits available to Claire in the honors program helped her develop her writing and analytical skills that were not as finely honed in her major coursework. In her words, "And I think honors program really solidifies that in saying here are our resources, here are our classes, we're here for you, but you need to be here for you."

Fiona

Born in South America, Fiona moved and settled with her family in the southeastern United States when she was four. When she was young, Fiona's parents told her it was "part of the plan" for her to attend college. Her decision to attend college was encouraged by her parents, who had some college in South America, but they did not earn a degree. Her parents did not have knowledge of American schools, which led to Fiona learning to negotiate a competitive system on her own.

During her high school years, she was motivated to study engineering by her father, who was good at math and believed engineering provided opportunities for her. Fiona took advanced physics but was told she needed "a lot of help," which began her routine of arriving early to school for assistance. Her physics teacher shared with Fiona her experience growing up in India and receiving a scholarship to attend college. Fiona felt a sense of connectedness through her conversations with her teacher—drawn together through their shared experiences of working hard in school and their identities as women in the sciences. While her desire to attend college was great, her opportunity to attend college was complicated by her immigration status. A Dreamer, Fiona and her parents knew it could be difficult for her to attend college. This difficulty did not dissuade her; it motivated her to push harder to get to college.

Fiona's first choice was Columbia University, but the need to step away from school for eighteen to twenty-four months for religious purposes would not be possible without having to reapply and face that uncertainty. Ultimately, Fiona decided upon a faith-based institution in the western United States that would allow her to step away easily when needed. Additionally, the faith-based school could award a financial package to help with the costs. As a Dreamer, Fiona

was not eligible for Federal financial aid, so the financial assistance relieved her family of a significant burden.

The honors program was not a consideration for Fiona when she began her first semester in college. She completed her first semester and then left school for eighteen months. Upon her return, a friend signed Fiona up to be a camp counselor, where she was paired with an honors college student. The honors student asked her many questions about her academic interests. His questions came at an opportune time as Fiona debated whether engineering was still the right path. Until that point, Fiona was not aware the university had an honors program, but the more she learned and was encouraged to participate, the more intrigued she became. The honors program did not have an application process; it was open to all students who wanted to participate. Fiona decided to join the day before classes began. It was a sudden decision made without much forethought.

Fiona entered her first honors class without trepidation; she had a friend from her home state in the class, which put her at ease. She had also heard from other honors students that the classes were "easier than other general education classes." The topics of the courses were interesting to her, helping her to see the intersections between different disciplines. In honors, Fiona flourished under the mentorship of her faculty and advisors. The professors were kind and created a supportive environment. The connection with the honors advisor influenced Fiona to seek leadership positions within the honors program, where she has served as president of the honors student association and as an honors advisor.

While her experiences in honors have been primarily positive, her time in honors has not been without some struggle. When it is time for students to begin their work on the honors thesis, they are assigned an honors coordinator to help guide them through the process. When Fiona

shared her topic and the direction of her study, she expected encouragement; however, she viewed the feedback as highly critical, focusing on the flaws and missing considerations. When she asked questions of the coordinator, she was told to find the answers herself. This experience was the first time Fiona keenly felt the impact of being a first-generation college student. She never considered herself less intelligent in her classes, but the thesis experience magnified the reality that she did not have parents she could go to for help and guidance. Fiona didn't want to continue with her thesis due to the hardship she experienced but reconsidered when she thought about the message not completing the thesis would send to other students. As a student leader, she wanted to model how to move through and overcome challenging times.

Haley

From a small town in the southwestern United States, Haley was "pushed" by her grandparents to attend college so she could "do better" and be "better" than others. While her grandparents, who adopted and raised her, wanted her to attend college, Haley came to know that she wanted to attend college for more reasons than meeting the expectations of her grandparents. Earning a college degree means she would "be able to [financially] help" her family. The way to do that was to graduate from college and have a "good career."

In high school, Haley's chemistry teacher fostered her interest in the field, and she graduated from the same medium-sized state university in the southwest Haley would attend. Haley's teacher helped her receive a scholarship from the American Chemical Society. Without consistent support from school counselors, Haley's teacher served in that role to help guide her through applying to college, filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and preparing her for interviews. Haley was grateful for her teacher's assistance because no one in her family could help her.

A more prominent faith-based university accepted Haley, but before deciding, she visited the smaller state university, where she immediately felt “at home.” When she first applied, she was unaware that the smaller school had an honors program. Haley first became aware of the honors program when she received a letter and an email. Admissions criteria to the honors program included high school grade point average, a written essay, and an interview. Initially, Haley felt uncertain if she would be accepted and wondered if she “would fit in” with the honors students; however, after the interview, she felt more confident in an eventual acceptance, which was “a big step up” for her family. To decide what school to attend, the larger private or the smaller public, she chose the smaller public because the larger school was too much of a change from her hometown.

To prepare for college, Haley connected with other students via social media. It helped her build relationships and feel more comfortable before she went to campus. Her honors orientation also eased her transition to college through activities designed to help the students get to know each other and an introduction to the honors directors, who were “welcoming and pleasing to be around.” The honors orientation helped Haley feel seen within the honors program and that the people wanted to help her. The first semester of college was “a lot” for Haley. With classes on Zoom, it was not easy to connect with her peers, and she missed having the ability to spend time with people outside of class. However, Haley was able to make something positive come from beginning classes online—when classes returned in person, she was “familiar with their faces,” which made it more comfortable to sit with them in her courses.

As a first-generation college student, when Haley heard her peers talk about their parents' careers, she could not relate. She felt that students with parents who went to college had more opportunities because of their networks. However, Haley felt a sense of freedom in charting her

own path, with no college-educated parents telling her what to do and no footsteps to follow. In the honors program, she was able to build connections and find people who could help her. Haley's hard work and effort did not go unnoticed and led to leadership positions within honors. She became an honors student association officer and resident assistant in the honors living and learning community. With the support of her faculty, staff, and peers, Haley built connections that moved her toward her goal of completing her education and made her know that she belonged in honors.

Haley worried she would be like her biological mom, who dropped out of high school, so when she felt like dropping out, she met with the honors director, who counseled her through her feelings and motivated her to keep pushing. The honors courses were challenging for Haley; however, she developed confidence in her academic abilities through them, which propelled her success in her non-honors courses. Honors gave her more than academic accomplishments—it gave her "a sense of family" in a place that celebrated her position as a first-generation college student.

Shyanne

Shyanne knew her parents did not attend college when she was in middle school. They impressed upon her that a college education would give her a "more stable life and career" than they had. Shyanne's mom tried to help her as she explored colleges and opportunities, but her mom could not answer many of her questions, so she spent much time "trying to find answers." The relationship Shyanne cultivated with her high school counselor was crucial to answering her questions and helping her decide where to go to college. When she was a high school athlete, she watched the team seniors' excitement when they talked about going to college. Listening to them

share what schools they got into and the campus tours they were taking brought a realization that college was a “real possibility” for her.

Shyanne considered multiple schools, including private schools in the Pacific Northwest and the Northeast. She had no desire to stay in her Western home state and attend college there. The public Pacific Northwest college she did decide to attend was not a consideration until she visited a friend and found herself at home. When she returned home, she immediately applied and decided to apply to the honors college even though she “didn’t know anything about it.” The two private schools she was considering were small compared to the public school; the honors college allowed Shyanne to be part of a smaller community at a bigger school.

The application process for the honors college included submitting a resume, writing an essay, and meeting a minimum grade point average. Shyanne was “very worried” she would not be accepted. Even though she had good grades and was very active in high school, she worried she was not good enough and doubted herself. Shyanne believes she “should have been a little more confident.” She was very excited when she received her acceptance to the honors college; however, understanding what it all meant would come later. Though Shyanne did not have an in-person orientation, she participated as a peer mentor in later honors college orientations. The orientation shared resources available to honors college students that differed from what the larger university could provide. Like in high school, where Shyanne had a counselor who could help her, it was important to her to know she had the same in college.

During her first year of college, Shyanne would compare her family to that of her roommate. Her roommate’s parents had attended college, so Shyanne’s roommate had more information about college; there were times Shyanne felt her roommate’s behavior was patronizing, which was hard to hear. Shyanne was aware she “didn’t come in as prepared as a lot

of people," but it did not make her feel out of place or that she did not belong. The longer Shyanne was in the honors college, the more she began to hear and notice other students who were also first-generation. She was not alone, and that was a comfort to her. Ensuring others felt that same comfort was important to Shyanne; she used her honors college employee position to share the resources with her and ensure all students felt welcome and seen. Knowing that she helps first-generation "break down" barriers, as others did for her, is gratifying.

Shyanne's university experience, while positive, has not been without struggle. She does not receive financial support from her parents. To help pay for college, Shyanne receives support from the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) to reduce her out-of-state tuition; however, the WUE will not cover the tuition for her major program. Her summer job helps defray some of the school costs, but the increase means Shyanne has to take out loans to pay the out-of-state tuition, which she has come to terms with. Shyanne would like to see honors colleges explore more ways to help first-generation college students overcome the financial difficulties inherent in attending college.

Even with the financial burden, the benefits of honors have kept Shyanne enrolled and pushing forward toward her degree. She realized that honors is more than just reading a textbook; it is about collaborating with a diverse group of people and knowing when to listen to others to learn from their perspective. Applying what she learned through honors has served her well in her non-honors classes and activities. Recognizing that other first-generation college students may compare themselves to others much as she did, Shyanne believes honors participation can give them a broader perspective and improve their skills to overcome comparative tendencies.

Data Collection and Analytic Procedures

Six interviews were completed with FGCS participating in honors from October 2022 through January 2023. The interviews averaged 30 minutes, with the actual interview time varying between 25 minutes and 37 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were informed of the researcher's background and professional interest in honors education. The interviews adhered to the prescribed protocol, and if the participant answered a question that had not been asked, the questions were either rearranged or modified.

The interview transcripts were read and analyzed as a group for coding consistency. Hard copies of the transcripts were read and color-coded in the first cycle. Phrases and words that aimed to answer the research questions were highlighted and given a color-coded eclectic code. During the second coding cycle, the transcripts were merged into one document to conduct a systematic analysis using keywords from the in vivo and eclectic codes. A multicycle coding process identified twenty-nine eclectic codes as shown and sixty-seven in vivo codes. Table 2 is a representation of how the eclectic codes and in vivo were organized into categories and finally into the three themes. The in vivo codes were used to demonstrate the validity of the themes and are present in the results.

Table 2

Codes and Themes

Themes	Categories Second Cycle	Categories First Cycle	Codes
Relationships	family	family influence, motivation to go to college, pre-college experiences, honors application, first in family	family (24), parent(s) 59, grandparent (9), brother, sister, or sibling (6), first-generation (30), application (16), apply (19), encourage (10), parents were the people that influenced me the most, parents were the people that influenced me the most
	high school teachers/counselor	pre-college, academics, college decision making, influence of others (not family), motivation to go to college	teacher (12), counselor (12), decision (12), AP (4), honors-high school (8), AVID (9)
	Peers	influence of others (not family)	friends (5), mentor (7)
	honors college or program faculty and staff	connections in honors	faculty (11), professor (31), advisor (10)

Academic Self-Concept	comparison of abilities to others	challenges in honors, honors knowledge	smart (9), I can't compare myself to kids who grew up here and how they think intellectually,
	impostor phenomenon	benefits CG over FGCS, imposter syndrome	smart (9), you don't have the support from your family the way that other students do, not every student has the same resources,
	self-efficacy	self-efficacy, autonomy, FG challenges	didn't know (11), I have no idea how this college process work
	motivation to stay in college	help-seeking behaviors, motivation to stay in honors, Influence of honors outside of honors – academics	trying (22), it encouraged me to get better grades and just keep up with my grades,
Sense of Belonging	relations with honors faculty and staff	support in honors honors courses, influence of honors outside of honors	encourage (18), support (7), resources (8), just the way he was encouraged me, There's just so many resources
	influence of an on peers	Belonging, FG challenges	comforted (1), mentor (7), being a peer mentor and getting to participate in it kind of gave me that full experience, So I definitely encourage it, not just to first-generation students, but all students, and now I get to help do that for others

	involvement in honors activities	honors involvement, honors influence, feelings about participating in honors	honors student leadership (3), peer mentor
	develoment of social and cultural capital	welcoming, cultural capital, FG honors students, cultural differences	welcome (3), get access to all those extra resources

Results

After a thorough and close reading of the participant transcripts, three themes emerged that best described the experience of first-generation college students in honors and provided answers to the research questions. The themes of relationships, academic self-concept, and influences on a sense of belonging are interconnected, and responses from the participants often fit into more than one theme. The following sections are the themes as they present in each research question.

Research Question 1

The lack of first-generation college students participating in honors precipitated the development of the first research question. The whole of the participants' experiences in honors answered RQ1. There were shared experiences among the participants, such as the influences on their decision to attend college and the assistance they had navigating the college search and application process. All the participants could identify a person or people who were influential in their decision to attend college.

Once at college, the participants had common experiences related to their status as a FGCS. They spoke of their academic-self concept, self-efficacy, and their awareness of their first-generation status in the classroom. Additionally, the participants articulated the influence of

their families on their decision and motivation to attend college. The participants were highly involved at their university; they served as mentors, ambassadors, student leaders, and office assistants. The relationship with the faculty and staff of their respective honors programs and colleges positively affected their sense of belonging and continuation in honors. The answer to RQ1 for the six participants can be distilled down to one element, relationships. In response to the interview questions, each participant spoke about the relationships that shaped their pre-college and college experiences.

Relationship with Family and High School Teachers and Counselors. All participants could identify one or more people who have influenced their decision to attend college, directly or indirectly. The influence of parents was evident in their decision to attend college. Alondra recounted,

> Well, they talk a lot about college and whether they, I think it was just more like the talk of you, you can go to college or you can go to college. It was kind of like they gave me an ultimatum in a way, like, more like you have to go to college. After I started saying oh, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to go to college, without really thinking it, they were more of, like, more pushy and like okay, you have to go to college.

While Alondra's parents were outspoken about their choice for her to attend college, the idea of attending college was not always fully articulated but was more of an expectation from their parents that they recognized. Haley's parents "pushed" her by telling her, "we want you to do better, you know, than this person, better than that person." Claire spoke of a similar approach by her parents who did not speak directly about going to college,

> They had worked really hard to put me in a place where I was able to. And I grew up, you know, under the poverty level and that sort of thing. And so, throughout high school, they really encouraged me to sort of, you know, make those good grades and make those scholarships and that sort of thing. So I really owe a lot of my education goals to them, you know, just to the host of people.

Families were not the only influence on the participants' consideration and eventual enrollment in college. They spoke of their interactions with teachers and high school counselors that gave them encouragement, support, and information. High school counselors are essential in helping first-generation students explore their options and provide guidance during the college decision-making process. Shyanne said of her counselor, “So I became super involved with my counselor in high school, and she was a huge support in helping me decide where to go to college and to explore all my opportunities.” Brandon said, “. . . my counselor was always challenging me to take these classes, take these IB classes, take these honors classes.” Haley grew up in a remote location with a “very small” school that could not provide consistent access to counselors. Fortunately, Haley had a teacher who filled the gap by mentoring her, and

> . . . really led me to college for sure. . . she kind of made that, not made that decision for me, but definitely influenced that decision for me. And yea, she even got me the American Chemical Society scholarships and things like that to the University of Tallcester. So she definitely pushed me to go.

Fiona had a similar experience with a high school teacher whom she recalls “definitely helped me realize that I wanted to go to college.” Two of the participants spoke of the influence of their peers. Shyanne talked about how the excitement of her swim teammates got her excited about going to college, and Alondra spoke about her peers who were on the same college path. Whether it be friends, a teacher, or a counselor, their presence in the participants' lives was necessary to fulfill their goal of attending college.

Other influences on the participants attending college were the programs and classes they took in high school and the relationships built within those programs. Five of the six participants mentioned taking honors classes in high school. Brandon, originally from Africa, recalled the impact taking English as a Second Language classes (ESL) courses had on his desire to perform well and attend college. Taking honors and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses,

> . . . in my opinion, was very, very difficult for me. Definitely, I think for most of the classes I sat in, it took me awhile for me to kind of understand what the teacher was talking about. But for some students, it came very easy, right? So, and the one thing about it was that I didn't have someone to tell me, I didn't have my parents telling me oh, you should take these classes. It was something that I found and because I wanted to challenge myself, that's why I took that kind of route in doing that. So, I definitely would say, like, high school, I really, I think it's been really helpful that I chose to do, I think it was kind of preparing me for college because, like, really, college classes are very, very difficult. So I think by taking those classes in high school kind of prepared me for college because, you know, as a first-generation student, it's very hard. You get to college, it's very, very difficult and sometimes, you know, you will probably get too much, like, you want to quit, give up, I mean, your parents didn't go to college and you're the one trying to be that first person to do it. But I think high school really prepared me for that. Taking those classes helped me transition to college. So I think that's what, you know, taking those advanced classes, the honors classes in high school helped prepare me for college.

Alondra's involvement in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), beginning in middle school, made the expectation of her parents and the possibility of college more attainable. Alondra was the only participant to recount involvement with a college preparedness program. The goal of AVID is to close the equity gap in the educational attainment of underrepresented groups, and it has proven efficacy in increasing college enrollments (Morley et al., 2021; Todhunter-Reid et al., 2020). The impact of AVID on Alondra's enrollment is evident when she talked about her high school years,

> So I think Avid had a huge part of me going to college or wanting to go to college. As a middle schooler, I didn't know much, but I just knew oh, go to college. But I don't think it hit me until probably like sophomore/junior year of high school. I think my high school year, my first year was a little rough. I just didn't know what I wanted. I was in probably, like, one honors class. So just, Avid just encouraged us to take honors classes, which was more advanced classes than the regular ones. After that, just my second year as a sophomore, I took more honors classes and I didn't think it was too bad compared to my regular classes. My junior year, I took a couple AP classes, which I was really nervous about. But I knew that it would just help me more in college and it would just give me a little boost. So I would say, just Avid helped me a lot, encouraging me to take these classes. Because, honestly, without Avid, I wouldn't have taken those honors classes, I wouldn't have been encouraged to take those AP classes.

While the influence of parents, teachers, counselors, peers, and their high school academic experiences greatly impacted their decision to attend college, a couple of the

participants also spoke of other factors driving them to college. Those factors included earning a degree to build a better life for their families, not only financially but also to create a legacy of educational attainment. Earlier, Brandon spoke of "trying to be that first person to do it." Haley wanted "to be able to help my family, my adopted family, financially. And one of the main ways to do that is through college and getting a good career, stuff like that." Claire spoke of a rough childhood and how "education was something I could control for myself."

All the participants spoke to the variables they used to ultimately decide where to attend college. Claire considered the distance to her home and familiarity with the region,

> And so I think Eastern was this sort of corner of things that were familiar to me. They were far enough away from home that I felt like I was my own person, but they were close enough that I was still, you know, within a half an hour if I got homesick my freshman year.

Shyanne and Haley's decisions were made on the campus feel when they visited. Shyanne stated, "it just felt like home here," and Haley commented, "it just felt like home here." Brandon, Shyanne, and Fiona commented about the affordability of the school they chose because of the financial package they received. Shyanne received a considerable waiver through the Western Undergraduate Exchange, allowing her to attend an out-of-state school at the in-state cost. Brandon and Fiona received additional support from the institution because of their religious affiliation with the school. Through AVID, Alondra visited her college and was familiar with the campus and other people who attended the school.

Being the first in the family also brought freedom and a sense of autonomy. Claire saw it as an opportunity and a responsibility to "create" her "own path." Haley expressed similar sentiments. She noticed that some continuing generation students were following in the "footsteps" of their parents and "doing whatever they [parents] want them to do." Haley used similar language to Claire when she said she was "creating my own path." The importance of

Haley's statement is connected to her desire not to be like her biological mother when she said, "I was really worried because my biological mom was like a high school dropout, and so I was really worried that I would kind of follow in her footsteps type thing." Not having a parental legacy to follow allowed the participants to chart their own course and reframe a challenge into a benefit.

Relationship to Honors. The National College Honors Council does not determine honors admission requirements. From the participant interviews, the recruitment and admissions practices of honors colleges and programs varied from institution to institution. Some participants knew they could apply before they came to campus; others learned about it when they arrived. Haley said, "I didn't even know that the University of Tallcester had an honors program when I first applied." Shyanne's response to how she learned about the honors program showed her general awareness of honors at the university level but that she did not know much about it,

> And so I think I just kind of like had this idea in my head that if I was going to go to a bigger school, I wanted to be in the honors program, if they had one. And I didn't really, I don't think I knew much about what an honors program in college would entail, but I just kind of had this standard in my head that I needed to be part of a separate community at a bigger school.

Claire and Brandon's experiences were much like Shyanne's; they knew they wanted to participate in honors from the time they were in high school. Fiona heard about the honors program when she was a camp counselor, and an honors student told her about it. Alondra was not aware that she had applied to the honors program,

> Okay, so I accidentally got into that program. The program offers a scholarship, I just saw the opportunity of a scholarship and I just got in it. I didn't really know I was in it until they were like okay, you're in the honors program. I was like, how did I get in this? And I just remembered that I had to apply into the honors program because of the scholarship.

Just as with how they heard about honors, the participants described different processes they went through to join honors. Brandon and Fiona's honors program is open to any student who meets a minimum grade point average, but first, they must meet with an honors advisor to determine fit with the program. The other participants underwent a more rigorous application process, including writing an essay, submitting a resumé, and meeting a minimum GPA requirement.

Relationships with Peers. The participants' relationships with their peers ranged from working in the honors office, serving as student leaders, and participating in peer mentoring and advising programs. The participants' relationship with peers had a reciprocal nature. Brandon's involvement with the honors student leadership council gave him the platform to recruit more students to honors,

> And it's very interesting, like, I have met first-generation students who also are a part of the honors program. And then seeing them being there and part of the program has helped me kind of, like, helped me realize to kind of, like, get out of there, explore more, get to know more about different majors or different, you know, disciplines around the world.

Shyanne said, "I looked up to my peer mentors to help break down that kind of scary barrier and now I get to help do that for others, whether or not they're first-generation." Claire also had the opportunity to serve as a peer mentor in her honors program and appreciated the "changes [that] have benefitted students coming in" when talking about the honors curriculum. Fiona served as an honors advisor and was the honors student leadership council president. Her leadership position meant she was "over a lot of the events and activities" with the goal to improve communication between students and faculty, especially when students do not enter honors within their first semester of college. As the resident assistant for the honors living and learning community, Haley commented that "being part of honors has provided me with so many

different connections and meeting so many different people and understanding different cultures and living styles and backgrounds and things like that."

Relationships with Honors Faculty and Staff. The participants' experiences with honors faculty and staff included comments about the classroom environment and interactions with honors faculty and staff. Alondra's World Civilizations course and freshman honors seminar engaged in active learning pedagogies to improve student understanding. When Alondra was first introduced to the games the professor was using to facilitate learning, she was confused,

> But I feel like it encouraged all of us to participate and to be involved and to just be more knowledgeable of things that are, that have happened or, yea, mostly things that have happened. And I would wish, or like, I wish, like, all honors programs could od these games because they are, they're a little tough, but I feel like the encourage people just to do better and just to have their eyes open. And not only that, but after a while, the games do get fun.

Alondra expressed appreciation for how honors faculty encouraged her in her courses just by the way they taught and provided feedback on assignments. For Brandon, the seminar-style honors courses "wasn't what [he] was expecting," but he came to appreciate how the course discussions help him develop his critical thinking skills. The "really interesting" course topics kept Fiona engaged in her classes and her not to "feel intimidated or anything like that," although, a difficult interaction with an honors faculty member did challenge Fiona and had her questioning her participation in honors. A "strong connection" with her honors advisor kept Fiona involved in her honors program, and Haley's honors director counseled her through a difficult conversation when she considered dropping honors.

Fiona's experience with her honors faculty was to note they "were super nice, so for me, at least, I had a really good experience." The time her faculty spent mentoring students was something her " honors program does really well." Alondra contrasted her professors' behavior from outside of honors and said, "They just taught and they taught and they taught, and they

didn't really focus on making a connection with the students." The influence of honors faculty and staff on the participants' persistence in college and honors was present in what they shared and how those relationships affected how they saw themselves as members of the honors and larger university community.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored how participation in honors impacted the participants' activities and learning outside of honors. The efficacy of honors cannot fully articulated by examining only student experiences wholly within honors. The influence of the honors experience on the participants was shown through the development of critical and analytical thinking skills and communication skills resulting in an increased self-concept. The participants also spoke of a desire and increase in university activities outside of honors.

The participants identified how the skills they developed in their honors courses transferred and were applicable to their non-honors courses and experiences. Brandon spoke to how honors helped him "realize to kind of, like, get out of there, explore more, get to know more about different majors or different, you know, disciplines around the world." The impact of honors went beyond the exploration stage as Brandon spoke of how helped him make think deeply and "I mean if you kind of sit there and think about it, I think you can definitely, like, find a connection there." He also believed the interdisciplinary honors program helped him learn to analyze and synthesize information to create new knowledge.

Claire found that the honors coursework helped her "skills in terms of writing or education." She said,

> You know, I'm not lacking in terms of writing and that, you know, analyzing paperwork and that sort of thing. So I think the honors program has really provided me those sort of skills that I've lacked these past couple of years.

The faculty positively impacted the student experience as well. When faculty encouraged the students by providing helpful feedback, taking the time to answer questions, and directing them to additional assistance, it positively affected their feelings toward their learning and honors. Alondra said, “the honors program and professor can just help me with those questions I have, or doubts” and her “honors professor was there, just, he would like if if he didn’t know the answer, he would help me know someone or just find someone that knew or that could answer my questions.”

The honors experience helped Fiona “. . .to ask better questions. And I think that’s really important. I think that, to me, like, that’s what college is all about.” Similarly, the effect of honors on Brandon’s experience outside of honors was helped him broaden his desire to “. . . explore more, get to know more about different majors or different, you know, disciplines around the world.” Haley was able to improve her communication skills through her honors education and spoke of how she was able

> . . .to walk into a room of a hundred people and be comfortable with sitting by someone random and starting a conversation. I was not like that in high school, like, at all. I was definitely one of the more quiet ones.

The participants shared how honors helped them learn to be better communicators and improve their willingness to learn more by being more open to different disciplines and people. Shyanne encompassed the thoughts of the other participants when she said

> through my honors courses that, you know, education isn’t necessarily about reading a textbook or listening to a professor talk or doing an assignment, it’s more about collaborating with the people around you and not being super headstrong in a group and taking a step back and just hearing what other people have to say. And I’ve been able to practice that in my non-honors classes and other things that I’m involved in around campus and work and everything just to gain new perspectives. And I feel like that’s made my perspective on education a lot more diverse.

The impact of honors was evident in the academic realm and the participants' social activities. Alondra said honors "encouraged me to go to events that I wouldn't ever think of going to. For example, like plays or just soccer games. Or just other, like, events we have." Fiona's perspective on the value of an education broadened beyond degree attainment to appreciate the value of presented opportunities. She said,

> And so the honors program has allowed me to kind of take a step back from that worthy goal and realize, okay, maybe extending one more semester is not a bad thing if I have the opportunity to go to California and learn about this thing, or to go to New Mexico and do a study on this, or to go to New York and participate in this conference. So for me, like, one thing I tell students a lot of times is like yes, you know, getting your degree as fast as you can is good. But just remember, you're going to miss out on a lot of other opportunities to learn and grow if that's the only attitude you're going to take in college. And it's not going to be a very fun experience if all you care about is just getting a diploma to be able to go out and work.

The participants' experiences with honors had varying impacts and implications on their university experiences. Their evaluation of the effects of their honors education displayed their ability to critically reflect on their academic and social development and discern the benefits gained from an honors education.

Research Question 3

The final research question within this study explored the participants' sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Within this theme are the participants' experiences with faculty, staff, and peers that influenced their sense of belonging. Also included are how the participants expressed the development of their social and cultural capital, which are essential to cultivating a sense of belonging.

Almost every participant positively recounted the support they received from their honors program. Shyanne noted that there were resources available to her that were not readily available to students outside of honors. Earlier, Haley spoke of her continuing-generation peers'

opportunities she does not possess; however, through honors, she could "also get that connection." Honors for Haley had created "a sense of family" through the support and celebration she received. She also said, "And when you come to honors, or you're part of a community like the honors program, the support and the happiness it brings you is so overwhelming that you can't do anything but succeed. I mean, it's really incredible." Claire believed that had she not participated in honors, she may not have received support, and honors created a "support system" to help her. Brandon commented on the ". . .they have counselors who can support, help first-generation students."

Participation in honors also encouraged the students to perform academically at a higher level and improve their academic abilities. Alondra said,

> But now that it's my second year, I really think the honors program challenges you. I mean, I think I'm already challenged enough in college, but it just challenges you more and not only that, but it encouraged me to get better grades and just keep up with my grades.

Haley expressed feeling similarly to Alondra, noting that the honors courses are not easy,

> . . . but the amount of support that you get helps you with the amount of difficulty of your courses and even the alternate courses that you have to take in honors, they're not difficult because of the support that the professors give you and the support that the directors can give us too, so.

While the comments from the participants were positive, Fiona spoke of an experience with an honors coordinator that negatively impacted her and had her consider leaving honors. Her interaction with the faculty left her doubting her ability to complete her honors thesis. In her recounting of the interaction, Fiona said

> So it was very much, like, dead-end answers that he would give me with very little help. And then he would just critique everything about my proposal and then would tell me, like, okay, go home and figure it out. But, like, the difference, the biggest difference that I see, as a first-generation student, you don't have the support from your family the way that other students do. So, like, for someone who's a first-generation student, it's hard to call your mom and say hey, I need help with this project, would you know how to do

> this? I think that was the biggest thing for me where I feel like other students can maybe handle that type of critique more just because they have parents who've been through the system and maybe can even guide them a little bit more.
>
> Fiona
>
> . . . talked to some other professors who I already had established relationships with and luckily, she was able to give me an extension on my thesis proposal and I was able to get the help that I needed. But I think for another first-generation student who doesn't already have those established relationships with professors or faculty that are there to support them, it can be a very daunting experience and really just not very fun or you wouldn't want to have to go through that experience.

Fiona recognized that it is difficult for some students to ask "for help because they've been navigating the system by themselves for a long time." While Fiona was able to overcome this challenge with the support of another faculty member, it caused Fiona to believe that faculty should have "better training for faculty on how to invite and understand that not every student is starting at the same place, not every student has the same resources."

The negative experience Fiona has with her faculty coordinator did have her consider leaving honors; however, she

> And I felt like if I didn't finish my thesis, I would be very hypocritical because I'm the one who gives the interviews. And I'm supposed to encourage and help students through the process. So I just felt like if I don't graduate with this, what type of an example will I be for other people?

Fiona's responsibility to other students motivated her to continue with honors. Brandon continues in honors because of his "desire to kind of grow, to challenge myself, I think that motivation kind of like helps me stay grounded that oh, I want to finish this. I want to complete honors program." One factor impacting Shyanne's motivation to stay in honors is that it

> opens the door for so many more scholarship opportunities and I've become aware of a lot of great scholarship opportunities for honors nursing students. So I think it would not be very helpful for me if I were to leave the honors program. There's just so many resources and like I said, it opens the door for so many more scholarships that I can apply to.

Involvement in honors also impacted study participants' decision to stay in honors. Five participants were highly involved in their honors programs. Fiona has served as the president of the honors student association, meets with students who are interested in honors, and has been an honors advisor. Haley was the vice president of her honors students association. Claire was a mentor for her honors program, as was Shyanne. Additionally, Shyanne worked in the honors office. Brandon also served as a member of the honors leadership council.

The study participants spoke of their academic self-concept and self-efficacy. Academic self-concept is the confidence a student experiences in their ability compared to their academic peers (Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020). Alondra shared,

> In the honors program, I would definitely say, I feel like everyone just knew what they were talking about. They all knew what was going on, and they knew how to answer the questions correctly, I would say. Compared to me, I was just always listening and just kind of listening to the professor and my classmates to see what was going on and just to catch up.

Brandon also spoke of how he felt compared to his peers,

> I feel like they are on this high intellectual thinking and I'm still trying to get to that level. So I think it's kind of, like, still trying to figure that out, kind of like many different ways to answer.

Closely related to academic self-concept is imposter phenomenon, the belief that recognition for academic accomplishments is unwarranted. Haley specifically mentioned it when asked about waiting to receive her acceptance into honors. She said,

> Being in high school, I was very involved and so I was like, I feel like that will give me some cushion. But at the same time, I barely made top ten percent and I felt kind of almost like imposter syndrome coming in because I didn't really know if I felt like I would fit in with the honors students. And I didn't know if I was smart enough to be with the honors students.

However, one participant, Alondra, raised her self-efficacy. She was succeeding in her honors classes, but her non-honors were not going as well. After talking to her honors professor, her

thinking about her academic performance changed to “Like I’m doing well in his classes, I can do well in all the other classes.” Speaking with her professor raised Alondra’s self-efficacy and and increased her cultural capital (Richards, 2022).

Cultural capital increases through knowledge gained from social interaction on campus. The participants' responses demonstrated the reduced cultural capital when they talked about what they did not know about college. Brandon “did not know when the deadline to sign up for fall classes was.” While Alondra was “. . .just very lost. I didn’t what we were doing a lot of the time, I was just very lost.” Shyanne was unaware of the support that would be provided to her and questioned why she did not expect it.

Students build social capital by increasing their network of people and resources on campus. The more active students are on campus within and outside of honors increases social capital. All the participants had demonstrated involvement both in and out of honors. Examples of outside-of-honors involvement include Haley serving as president of the university student government and as a resident assistant. Shyanne participates in her university’s TRIO STEM program, and Alondra talked about going to events she “wouldn’t ever think of going to.”

Students build social and cultural capital as they become more familiar with the university (Acevedo & Lazar, 2022). The longer the exposure to college, the more opportunities to build capital; however, the participants were always aware of their generational status. While continuing generation students have their parents' experiences and college knowledge to guide them, the study participants did not have the same benefit. However, not having college-educated parents benefited a couple of the participants. Claire felt a sense of loss about experiences she could never have, but also recognized that it did not affect her ability to get an education. She said,

> But it's the kind of thing where you walk around with your parents or your older siblings or something and they show you around and like, oh, this was our favorite spot back when we attended Eastern, or this was our favorite thing or whatever else. And so I think, like I said, I would have loved to experience those things with my parents, technically. But I also understand that it is not a requirement when it comes to education.

Haley expressed this as

> It's kind of like that where you kind feel like you walk into a classroom and you have one person that has all of these connections because of their father or they have all these connections because of their mother. And sometimes it can feel like they have more opportunities than you strictly because you don't know as many people.

Shyanne's roommate was a resource for her, though there were times roommate's comments bothered her. She said,

> But I often found myself kind of comparing myself to her family just because I knew that they had all gone to college and she happened to know so much more about the program than I did. And that was kind of hard for me. I think it was, I know she never meant to, but sometimes it felt like she was almost talking down to me and that was hard, just not, I just didn't come in as prepared as a lot of people. And I think I was very aware of that.

While the impact of being a first-generation college student on their experiences varied among participants, all of them reported that the aforementioned experiences influenced how they expressed their sense of belonging. Included below are the abridged responses of the participants in which the participants answered the question, "Do you feel you belong in honors?" For some of the students their response to belonging was immediately in the affirmative such as Haley who said, "For me, absolutely I do feel that. I feel extremely supported and loved and liked by the people that I work with, that I'm surrounded by. . . .So yea, no, I definitely feel like I belong in honors." Brandon also had an immediately positive response,

> Yea. I feel like a sense of belonging at VTU honors program, I think, yea, definitely, I do have that sense of belonging there. . . . Same, kind of, like, friendship, I think. But definitely, so it has let me have a sense of belonging. Especially I've been able to meet people from various backgrounds in the VTU honors program. And I like that because I am an International Relations major, so that's something I like. I like to get to know people from different areas of the world, from different disciplines.

Responses to the question about belonging often included the relationships that influenced their belonging such as Claire's answer who specifically mentioned the role of faculty and the honors program director.

> Yea, so I think our faculty, and the man who directs our program, I think they've done a really good job in not only accepting first-gen college students, but kind of, you know, holding them in a place that's like okay, we understand that your experiences are different coming in and we appreciate your experiences and we appreciate you being here. . . .And so I think in terms of the honors program, I don't think I've ever felt a sense of unbelonging, if that's, you know, because I was in honors. So I think, it's never been a make-or-break moment of me being first-gen. It's more been you're valued because you're first-gen.

Though positive, one response to belonging was tempered through the lens of academic self-concept. Shyanne said

> I definitely do. Even though, like I mentioned, I feel like I'm kind of subconsciously comparing, . . .And you can, I think just the more you open your eyes and your ears and just, like, I don't know, like take down those barriers, you get to see that there really are people all around you who are different and there's a place for everyone.

Two participants Alondra and Fiona did not answer the question as positively as the other participants. Alondra said

> Mmmm…that is, I would say, like, a hard question. I would say it's a hard question because at first, I didn't think I belonged in the honors program. I felt like everyone was too smart. . . .I feel like it helps me and it encourages me to be where I'm supposed to be. Because after high school, like my first year was just a mess, I would just it was like a downfall and just being in the honors program has helped me and encouraged me to be where I'm supposed to be. To be where I was in high school, like getting all these good grades, participating in things.

Fiona's response was positive; however, that is due to the timing of the question. As she said

> Honestly, I think if you would have asked me that question a couple of years ago, my answer would be different. But I would say I do belong in the honors program. I feel like I've been able to make a space for myself. And I'm super involved with the program right now.

Multiple factors shape a sense of belonging and its construct over time, as is evident in the participants' responses (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019; Museus & Chang, 2021). They reflected and spoke about the people, their self-concept, and the time it took to feel a sense of belonging in honors.

The participants' answers to the interview questions were insightful and provided valuable information to answer the research questions. From deciding to attend college to their experiences within college, all participants voiced the influence of relationships, their academic self-concept, and the influences on their sense of belonging. The three themes identified from the analysis of the participant's responses are further explicated in Chapter V.

Chapter V

Discussion

Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative.

-John Dewey

Introduction

The genesis of this study arose from the scarcity of research exploring first-generation college students (FGCS) in honors and the underrepresentation of FGCS in honors (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Of the 15.9 million undergraduate students in the United States, first-generation college students number nearly 6.4 million of U.S. undergraduate enrollment (Cataldi et al., 2018). Students enrolled in honors colleges and programs number 300,00-400,000, and within honors, only 28% are FGCS (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Irwin et al., 2022). The known social, health, and economic benefits of a college degree are well documented, as are the benefits of participating in a collegiate-level honors program or college (Breitwieser et al., 2017; Carnevale et al., 2021; Rinn & Plucker, 2019; Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). Increasing the number of FCGS in honors will bring enrollment parity and situate students in an environment with proven effectiveness of student success.

Recognizing the importance of an educated and economically-stable citizenry, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 created federal programs to increase post-secondary education participation and opportunities for disadvantaged students (McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Office of Postsecondary Education, 2020). One such program is Student Support Services, a federally funded TRIO program that assists low-income and first-generation students in completing their college education (McElroy & Armesto, 1998).

Conversely, honors programs and colleges were created to serve high-achieving students and provide many services to assist in degree completion (Diaz et al., 2019; Rinn, 2006). The changing demographics of university students have compelled honors professionals to examine what it means to be an honors student and to increase educational equity in honors by examining accessibility (Badenhausen et al., 2020).

The literature examined in this study sought to provide context for the experiences of first-generation college students, honors students, and first-generation honors students. Constructing a framework upon which the experiences of FGCS in honors could be better understood and supported is essential to promote equity and inclusion in honors. The three research questions were constructed from the extant literature about student success factors, honors, and FGCS. The three qualitative research questions were:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation students participating in university honors programs or colleges?
2. How has the honors experience shaped and influenced the college experience outside of honors in first-generation honors students?
3. How do first-generation students experience a sense of belonging and self-efficacy in and through their honors education?

Summary of the Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted from October 2022 through January 2023 with six first-generation college students participating in honors at United States four-year public and private universities. The participant interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and member-checked. The two coding cycles resulted in three themes: relationships, academic self-concept, and influences on a sense of belonging. The participant experiences were not easily

confined to one theme as each theme contained elements of the others, and all contributed to the overall richness and complexity of the participants' experiences.

The first and overarching research question of this study explored the experiences of first-generation colleges students participating in honors. The findings showed first-generation college students in honors are influenced by various factors, with relationships playing a crucial role in their success. In this study, the dominant theme identified through research findings was the significance of relationships. Each participant highlighted multiple relationships that influenced their decision to attend college and shaped their experiences in honors. Family emerged as a key influence on FGCS. Previous literature has documented the impact of family on FGCS' decision to attend and persist in college. Apart from family, other relational influences also played a significant role in participants' college journeys. High school teachers and counselors were found to have a positive impact on FGCS' disposition to attend college, aligning with existing literature. Once enrolled in college, the study participants recognized the importance of institution-based relationships for their success. The honors faculty and staff played a crucial role in welcoming and supporting the participants.

The second research question sought to know how the honors experience shaped and influenced the college experience outside of honors for first-generation college students. The findings suggest that participating in honors can have positive effects on the college experience for FGCS. the honors experience influenced first-generation honors students' college experience by enhancing their self-efficacy, academic self-concept, communication skills, access to resources, critical thinking abilities, and overall engagement on campus. It also helped address impostor syndrome and facilitated the transfer of learning to non-honors activities. The

interaction within the honors environment played a significant role in shaping these positive outcomes.

The final and third question of the study explored how FGCS experience a sense of belonging and self-efficacy in honors. The research findings highlighted the contributing factors to a sense of belonging, such as a supportive and challenging environment, relationships with faculty and staff, and the motivation of the students. The participants in the study spoke about how the honors environment provided support and challenges, which helped them develop a positive academic self-concept and a willingness to view education as a lifelong learning experience. The study findings also emphasized the importance of support in increasing a sense of belonging. The participants mentioned the resources and support offered by their honors programs and colleges, including counselors and peer mentors. Acting as resources for other students through peer mentoring had a positive impact on the participants' honors experiences.

The answers and findings to the three research questions were thematically organized to examine the experience of FGCS in honors. Further explication of the findings to the three research questions are found in the proceeding section wherein the three themes of relationships, academic self-concept, and influences on sense of belonging are elaborated upon. The findings provided valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the overall success of FGCS in honors, illuminating the potential implications for program development and support initiatives.

Theme One: Relationships

Relationships are essential to the success of all first-generation college students. The central research question within this study was to understand the experiences of first-generation college students in honors. The research findings established relationships as the dominant theme

within the data. Each participant identified multiple relationships that affected their disposition to attend college and their subsequent honors experiences.

Family

The influence of family on FGCS to attend and persist in college is well documented in the literature (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022; E. M. Brown et al., 2020). First-generation college students rely on their families for support and encouragement to attend college and for emotional support once enrolled (Capannola & Johnson, 2022). Conversely, some FGCS experience family conflict and achievement guilt as their families do not fully understand their decision to attend college (Covarrubias, Landa, et al., 2020; Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

The participants were asked about the influence of family on their decision to attend college. Some parents stated it explicitly that college attendance was not optional. Fiona's parent's expectations were openly expressed, "They told me, like, even when I was very little, like, that was always kind of like part of the plan was for me to go to college." Alondra felt that her parents gave her an "ultimatum" that pushed her into going to college. The expectations of Brandon's parents were more subtly conveyed, "All they [parents] wanted for me was to go to college, graduate from college and get a good job." Haley's grandparents "pushed" her by telling her "we want you to do better, you know, than this person, better than that person. . .I was like, I kind of what want that too." Alondra said her parents wanted to see her fulfill her dreams and that "they just want to see me succeed and want to see me where I say I want to be." The impact of family is evidenced in diverse ways; for Claire, a "rough childhood" motivated her to attend college to assert her agency and take control of her life.

The participants' experiences did not gesture toward any sense of family conflict or achievement guilt regarding their decision to attend college. The families of the study

participants fostered and encouraged education which influenced their decision to attend college (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Their responses indicated an alignment between their academic expectations and their parents' educational aspirations, which increased the likelihood of enrolling in and graduating from college (Trinidad, 2019).

Though the participants spoke positively about the support of their families to attend college, they recognized that their families could not assist them when it came to the details of college or college preparation. Not being able to go to their parents for help with academic matters began in high school for Brandon because he "didn't have [his] parents telling [him] oh, you should take these classes." Claire saw continuing-generation students sharing experiences with their families that she could not, and she "would have loved to experience those things" with her parents. Fiona commented,

> for someone who's a first-generation student, it's hard to call your mom and say hey, I need help with this project, would you know how to do this? I think that was the biggest thing for me where I feel like other students can maybe handle that type of critique more just because they have parents who've been through the system and maybe can even guide them a little bit more.

The literature states that first-generation college students want to improve their families' lives through the social and financial opportunities that come from earning a college degree (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Keppens et al., 2023). First-generation college students also express responsibility to serve as role models for their families (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Keppens et al., 2023). Brandon, aware of how his educational path would affect those who came after him, voiced

> I think part of me also wanted to stay is how much I can tell my future generation, this is what I did, right? That I did not grow up here, but this is what I decided to do when I got here. So if I was able to do this, I mean, you can do it.

Within this study, only Haley specifically mentioned the financial benefit of a degree stating she wanted “to be able to help my family, my adopted family, financially.” Fiona recognized the financial benefits of degree attainment but did not speak to it in reference to her personal reasoning but in the larger context of the importance of education.

> And now a lot of people, what I have found at least with other Hispanic students is you go to college, you try to get out of college as fast as you can with a diploma so you can start working. So you can start making money so you can support your family in one way or another. And I think that’s a really good and worthy goal. But I think that because students have that mindset, they miss out on a lot of other opportunities that they will never have once they leave the university.

In contrast to the existing literature's emphasis on first-generation college students' desire to improve their families' lives through social and financial opportunities, the participants in this study did not explicitly express this as their primary motivation. While one participant mentioned the financial benefit, others emphasized personal growth and the broader significance of education. These diverse perspectives emphasize the multifaceted nature of first-generation college students' experiences and highlight the importance of considering a range of motivations when studying this population.

Other relational influences

The family was not the only factor influencing the participants going to college. Chapter II introduced Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model for the college search process, which begins with college disposition. The participants’ experiences did not deviate from the published literature on the impacts of high school teachers and counselors on college-going (Whiteside, 2021). There is no question regarding their disposition to attend college, as evidenced by their post-secondary enrollment.

Each participant noted high school teachers and counselors who believed in their ability to succeed in college, positively impacting their college-going disposition and subsequent

enrollment (Tang & Ng, 2019). When asked who, outside of his family, influenced his decision to apply for college, Brandon spoke of the support from his ESL teacher and high school counselor; their belief in his academic ability bolstered his confidence. He said,

> So my teacher in ESL and when I got to my junior year, my counselor was always challenging me to take these classes, take these IB classes, take these honors classes. So my counselor and my ESL teacher were very influential in my life, yea.

Haley's chemistry teacher talked with her about college, provided her with resources, and assisted with a discipline-specific scholarship. Haley recalled that her chemistry teacher "really led me to college for sure." As a woman of color, Fiona appreciated the help she received from her physics teacher, who moved to the United States from India. The teacher took the time to help Fiona, and she

> would often go to her really early in the mornings. And we would just sit there and sometimes she would just tell me bits and pieces of her life story. And I would say, like, she definitely had a big influence on my life because told me for her, she didn't really have the money to go to college in India, especially if you're a female. But she was able to work really hard and she got a scholarship through the government that enabled her to go to college and she ended up paying, like, one penny for college, back in the day. So I would say her influence definitely helped me realize that I wanted to go to college.

While Alondra's parents had the most influence on her decision to attend college, she noted her participation in AVID, specifically her AVID teacher, also had an impact. Through AVID, she was encouraged to take high school honors and Advanced Placement courses. Preparing for college through AVID provided the resources to help her apply and enroll (Todhunter-Reid et al., 2020).

The second and third phases of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model are the search itself and choice. Considerations students make to determine where to attend college are location, size of the institution, cost of attendance, and fit. The study participants articulated the factors they considered during their search and eventual selection process. The distance from home was a

crucial factor for the participants. Brandon's distance from home was a positive factor because he could see more of the United States; however, Claire wanted to stay closer to home as it was more familiar and comfortable for her. Shyanne wanted to leave her home state, attend a “bigger school,” and “be part of a separate community at a bigger school.” Haley initially considered a larger private school, but the smaller one was better as she “was used to such a small school.” The cost of attendance was a factor for Alondra, Claire, Fiona, Brandon, and Shyanne, who considered the scholarships and tuition waivers in deciding where to attend.

Though the published literature indicates FGCS have internal conflict when going away to college as they develop their autonomy and work through achievement guilt, the participants within this study did not express any such conflict or guilt (Garza & Fullerton, 2018; Gibbons et al., 2019). Additionally, FGCS attend university closer to home than their continuing-generation peers; within this study half of the participants attended close to their home town (within two hours) while the other half attending university out of state (Garza & Fullerton, 2018). At the time of this study, it is unknown if the distance from their town of residence will affect their degree attainment, as Garza and Fullerton (2018) found that when a FGCS attends university from their home they increase their odds of obtaining a degree. The motivation to attend college and where to attend was influenced in different ways but yielded the same results—the participants all enrolled in college and were persisting at the time of this dissertation.

Institution-Based Relationships

Once enrolled in college, the need to foster and cultivate relationships was essential for the success of the study participants. The honors faculty and staff welcomed students warmly. They provided them with assistance and resources, building a foundation of trust upon which the study participants could construct social and cultural capital (Glass, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2018).

When Fiona was interested in honors, the program interviewed her to learn more about her and to discuss "whether or not the program is a good fit" which began "a really strong connection with the advisor over the students." The connection built with her advisor eventually led to a position in the honors college, where she now helps interview prospective students.

Shyanne's advisor "has helped [her] through so much and many major changes and applications and everything." As a FGCS she did not know how to navigate college,

> you know, in high school, I had my counselor who I got my resources from. And, you know, I was starting college, my parents hadn't been to college, so just realizing that I had a lot of support in the honors college was kind of the biggest thing that, I don't know why I didn't expect it, but I just didn't really know it was going to be there.

Fiona's experience with her honors thesis coordinator had her questioning her want and ability to complete her honors thesis. She said "maybe I was just not meant to do that," but instead of on acting her initial impulse to drop the thesis, she "went and talked to some other professors who [she] already had established relationships with" to find a solution. The relationships developed with honors faculty and staff helped Fiona persist while she also recognized that not all students have the same privilege and how "daunting" or "just not very fun" the experience could be for less socially connected students.

The importance of solid relationships between honors faculty and staff and first-generation college students cannot be understated. Involvement in the "academic experience" positively impacts college persistence (Astin, 1984, p. 518). Of the different types of involvement, faculty/student interactions strongly influenced student satisfaction (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) found that honors participation influenced student satisfaction with closeness to faculty. The success of first-generation college students continues to find its foundation in the relationships FGCS students build with faculty (McCallen & Johnson, 2020).

First-generation college students need faculty and staff to come alongside them to assist them with navigating a new environment. The participants' relationships with faculty and staff helped them by introducing them to a network of people and resources that influenced their persistence (Martin et al., 2020; McCallen & Johnson, 2020). Positive and supportive relations positively affect students' academic self-concept and sense of belonging (Almeida et al., 2021). All the study participants spoke positively about their interactions within the honors environment. Their comments included "it boosts my way of thinking and it kind of has guided me towards the right path," "I do think that honors is a really great opportunity for first-gen students just to kind of expand their horizons and get access to all those extra resources," and "honestly, I feel like we are very celebrated within the program." Themes two and three explore academic self-concept and influence on a sense of belonging which are affected by the relationships and interactions FGCS have within the university environment indicating the imperative that FGCS have positive faculty interactions (Museus & Chang, 2021).

Theme Two: Academic Self-Concept

The study participants' self-efficacy and academic self-concept increased with their continued participation in honors; self-efficacy increased with positive social support and successful experiences, as demonstrated through the participant narratives and theme analysis (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019; Museus et al., 2018). Their academic self-concept increased when they began to lessen the behavior of comparing their academic abilities to others (Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020). The initial impact of honors on Brandon had him thinking that the other students were "very, very smart" and compared himself to others when thinking, "wow, there's no way I would have thought to answer the question this way." Brandon did not allow the feeling that others were more intellectually prepared than him stop him from persisting, saying, "I'm like the

kind of person when I decide on something, I want to see it to where, I would like to see it to a complete end place." Alondra, upon entering her honors program, questioned her participation, "at first, I did regret it" but later she found that it "encouraged [her] to get better grades and just keep up with [her] grades."

There is research to support a connection between faculty and student communication with increased academic performance and higher retention (Dean, 2019; Guzzardo et al., 2021). The participants' responses regarding how honors affected their overall university experiences suggested that their ability to communicate with faculty and peers increased as their belief in their abilities increased. Alondra's interactions with one of her honors faculty members "encouraged [her] to do so much better in [her] other classes." Spending "a lot of time in professor's office talking with them" positively impacted Fiona's college experience. She said, "through the honors program, I've been able to meet a lot of really cool, inspiring people who just kind of motivate me to wanting to study more."

The participants' academic self-concept was affected by resources and support to navigate the academic expectations of college. An environment that encourages the development of a higher academic self-concept influences academic achievement and skills development (Guo et al., 2022). The participants spoke of varying types of resources provided such as living and learning communities for FGCS, scholarships for FGCS, FGCS specific advising, peer mentoring, and faculty mentoring. The resources provided within honors were a "huge, huge help" for Shyanne as she knew who she could go to for assistance. Claire also commented on the availability of resources "that were never received otherwise" outside of honors.

When considering the academic rigor of honors, Fiona said, "I didn't think it was going to be, most people told me that the classes were actually easier than other general education

classes. So I wasn't scared of, like, is this workload going to be too much for me?" As she continued in her honors courses, Fiona refined her critical thinking ability, allowing her to "ask better questions." Alondra was "nervous" and "lost" when she first began her honors courses though, within time, she began to understand and "it just became easier," and discussions with her honors faculty "encouraged [her] to do much better in my other classes." Honors courses, though initially unfamiliar and different from what the study participants expected, with support from honors faculty and staff, the participants became more confident in their ability to perform academically at an honors level (Guo et al., 2022).

Ramsey and Brown (2018) found that impostorism is more prevalent within FGCS, though only one participant, Haley, specifically mentioned imposter syndrome. She was concerned about whether or not she would "fit it with the honors students" and that she "didn't know if [she] was smart enough to be with honors students." Impostorism is the belief that intellectual recognition is undeserved or a mistake (Clance & Imes, 1978). Haley's comments were more an expression of her ability in comparison to her peers rather than a belief she didn't earn her admission to honors or that she was a fraud. The other study participants expressed similar beliefs such as Brandon who commented that his honors peers were "on this high intellectual thinking and I'm still trying to get to that level" and Alondra who did not know if she was "smart enough."

The findings of Clark et al. (2018) indicate that honors students' academic success is a function of their more realistic academic performance expectations, which assists them in applying their skills more effectively. A higher sense of self-efficacy strongly predicts continued growth and development (Bandura, 1982). The participants initially believed they were academically less capable than their peers who were not first-generation college students but

continued in the honors program. However, as they engaged in the honors experiences and reflected on the benefits beyond the honors realm, their perceived differences from their peers diminished. They realized that their participation in the honors program positively impacted their performance and self-efficacy not only within the honors context but also in other areas outside of the program (Diaz et al., 2019).

The recognition of how the learning within honors translated outside of honors was demonstrated by Claire when she said, “So I think the honors program has really provided me those sort of skills that I’ve lacked these past couple of years.” The smaller classroom environment of honors gave Haley the confidence “to reach out to people I don’t know to partner with them” because she was able to start “small and then work [her] way out.” Building relationships on campus and increasing her comfort level in large classes gave Haley the confidence to begin conversations with people she did not know. Students more involved and engaged on campus are more likely to persist (Astin, 1984). The participants’ involvement in college activities led to persistence and increased social and cultural capital. Through their honors involvement outside the classroom, the study participants built their networks on campus. Their cultural capital increased through closer familiarity with college processes, and social capital was built as they met more people outside of honors through their work.

In Chapter IV, Alondra spoke of how her academic performance in an honors class gave her the confidence to succeed in her other university classes and try new things. Brandon spoke of how honors helped him “explore more” and connect with others, while Alondra’s honors experience encouraged her to engage more in campus activities. Shyanne improved communication came from not talking to people but exercising the ability to “[take] a step back and just [hear] what other people have to say.” The influence of honors on the participants’ non-

honors activities supports Lamnina and Chase's (2019) findings that curiosity leads to transfer. The participants' curiosity in their academic pursuits and social interactions with others indicate alignment with findings that demonstrate curiosity predicts academic performance (Von Stumm et al., 2011). Haley credited her honors participation with an increased commitment to her education, "I feel like if I wasn't an honors student and I was just coming and going, I don't think I would feel as dedicated to study as I do now." The participants' experiences evidenced a propensity for curiosity, leading to increased transfer and academic performance.

Lewin (1936) described behavior as a function of the person and their environment, B=*ƒ*(P, E). The behavior of the participants resulted from their interaction within the honors environment. The interactions with faculty and the belief in their ability to persist through challenges and explore beyond honors were atypical for FGCS but typical for honors students (Covarrubias, Jones, et al., 2020; Rinn et al., 2020).

Theme Three: Influences on Sense of Belonging

Students who feel they belong in their university or college tend to have a more positive experience overall. This sense of belonging can lead to various benefits, such as increased involvement in university activities and events, better academic preparation and performance, and stronger social connections with peers (Strayhorn, 2019). The three contributing factors relating to a sense of belonging are a supportive and challenging environment, relationships with faculty and staff, and the motivation and determination of the student to achieve success (Brooms, 2019). An analysis of the participant interviews and, more specifically, responses to the question about their sense of belonging in honors reflected Brooms's (2019) contributing factors of a culture of challenge and support, relationships with faculty and staff, and the student's motivation and determination to achieve success.

The honors environment created a space where the participants were supported and challenged. In their honors courses, the study participants did not give up when difficulties arose but faced challenges and found success. Alondra spoke at length about the classes she has taken from one particular honors faculty member; her interactions with him helped increase her academic self-concept. She said, “I think the most challenging thing was having him as a professor as a freshman honors seminar and as a World Civ class.” Doing well on the essays in her honors course had Alondra questioning why she “wasn’t doing well in other classes.” When asked what the honors professor did that her other faculty didn’t do, Alondra said,

> just, him grading those essays, him writing these feedbacks, like okay, you need this, you need that. Just opened my eyes and encouraged me, like if I did well on his essays, if I am doing well in his class, if I can do these harder courses he’s doing, why can I not do these classes?

Brandon expressed similar sentiments about the challenge of honors, “I still want to keep challenging myself, I still want to keep pushing myself. And I started taking the classes and I liked it, and I liked how they pushed me.” Additionally, they demonstrated a greater willingness to view education as more than just a means to a career but as a foundation for lifelong learning and exploration. Fiona said of only attending college to get a degree, “you’re going to miss out on a lot of other opportunities to learn and grow if that’s the only attitude you’re going to take in college.”

Support is essential in increasing a sense of belonging in a challenging environment (Gillen-O’Neel, 2019). The participants’ honors programs and colleges offered resources to help overcome challenges which was supported by the participants’ experiences. Multiple study participants spoke of the support they received. In Chapter IV, Brandon spoke of the counselors for first-generation students, and Claire remarked that honors offered “support that you may not have received otherwise” and found their assistance to be “really supportive.” The participants

themselves were instrumental in the creation of a supportive environment. Claire served as a peer mentor to help other students, and Shyanne's student employee position in the honors office gave her the opportunity to

> to be a student welcoming them into the office kind of like breaking down that barrier has been really cool because, like, I looked up to my peer mentors to help break down that kind of scary barrier and now I get to help do that for others, whether or not they're first-generation.

Fiona offered herself as a resource for other students. As a FGCS, she knew the challenges that awaited others

> And I will sincerely tell them, like, think of me as your older sister who's giving you advice on what to do. This experience can very much change your life. And I always give them my email, like, if you feel like you have don't have the support you need, let me know and let's get you the help that you want

Acting as a resource for other students, whether formally or informally, peer mentoring had a positive impact on the participants who had opportunity to experience it. Claire appreciated how the implementation of a peer mentoring "benefitted students coming in." For Shyanne, acting as a peer mentor "gaver [her] that full experience, which was a lot of fun." Peer mentoring provided opportunities to broaden and enrich their honors experiences.

Brandon's sense of belonging included elements of connection and shared cultural experiences. First-generation college students are more likely to engage in higher education norms to be successful; however, Fiona couched her sense of belonging development by making "space" for herself (Payne et al., 2021). She accomplished this by becoming "super involved" in her honors program as a teaching assistant for two classes and working in the honors advising office.

The findings of this study do not conform to the conclusions from Payne et al. (2021) or Chang et al. (2020), wherein FGCS were reticent to engage in help-seeking behaviors for fear of

judgment or of being viewed as a burden. Alondra demonstrated help-seeking behaviors when she said, “And I think if I ever have a question or just any doubt, the honors program and professor can just help me with those questions I have, or doubts.” Fiona’s experience was similar, for when she needed assistance, she said, “And then I went and talked to some other professors who I already had established relationships with and luckily, she was able to give me an extension on my thesis proposal and I was able to get the help that I needed” In addition to the assistance from faculty, Haley also included honors administration and other students, “but with honors, if you have those people like the directors and your higher, upperclassmen to help you through it, then you’ll be golden.”

A demonstrated history of help-seeking behaviors and their ability to build positive and helpful relationships in high school were crucial to the participants’ success in college (Richards, 2022; Ricks & Warren, 2021). The participants built stronger social connections through the relationships with the honors faculty, staff, and peers. They expressed acceptance and value for who they are and gratefulness for the opportunities available to them in honors. Each participant’s sense of belonging in honors was constructed on the foundation laid by their pre-college experiences, as their high school teachers and counselors let them know they mattered (Strayhorn, 2019). Elements of mattering are feeling respected, recognized, and appreciated (Prilleltensky et al., 2020). As previously illuminated in Chapter IV, each participant identified someone from their high school, either a teacher or a counselor, who took time to answer questions about college or encouraged them in their academic pursuits. Brandon said, “my counselor and my ESL teacher were very influential in my life.” For Alondra, her AVID teacher “encouraged [her].” Haley and Fiona identified their chemistry and physics teachers as people who gave their time to help.

Of the six study participants, only Fiona and Alondra, the only two Hispanic or Latino participants, expressed an initial feeling of not belonging in honors but did develop a sense of belonging over time. Their experiences demonstrated how context affects the fluctuating nature of a sense of belonging (Bauman et al., 2019; Bowman et al., 2019). A narrative of the participants' experiences would not be accurate and truthful if the participants' challenges with honors education were not addressed. Brandon spoke of the lack of representation in the honors college by first-generation college students. He said, "it's definitely one of the problems I've been working on." Fiona's honors experiences were positive; however, she laid an indictment upon honors because of the low number of students of color and first-generation students in honors. Fiona believes to increase the number of underrepresented and FG students,

> recruitment should be going to where these minority students, these first-generation students are instead of waiting for them to come to you. Because if your program is just waiting, they're never going to come. The numbers aren't going to increase if you're not actively looking for these populations and inviting them to come and join.

Their concerns are not unwarranted, and research in this study supports their position. The research findings suggest that first-generation college students are well-served through mentorship, academic support, an inclusive community, and financial assistance from honors (Abukar, 2022; Bowman & Culver, 2018). Despite the positive effects of honors experienced by the study participants, not all FGCS may experience the same impact and results. Culturally insensitive environments and a lack of diversity in honors contribute to feelings of isolation and stress (Henfield et al., 2014). Fiona shared

> Like, you can basically count the number of Black students or the number of Hispanic students. And so just, like, at first it didn't faze me as much, but then you hear the words like micro-aggressions. I feel like a lot of students don't realize that some of the comments that they make can make other people feel like they don't belong.

By creating an open and welcoming environment, faculty and staff cultivate a space where FGCS feel safe to share who they are and are recognized for their value and worth to the community (Ellis et al., 2019). It is equally important not to make assumptions about FGCS because assumptions marginalize them and negatively impact their sense of belonging (Ellis et al., 2019). First-generation college students bring social and cultural capital to college— it differs from continuing-generation students but is just as valuable.

Conclusion

First-generation college students are underrepresented in the literature on honors education and within honors enrollment (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019; Mead, 2018; National Collegiate Honors Council, n.d.-a; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Students who participate in honors graduate at a higher rate than non-honors students, and even some honors positively affect college retention (Diaz et al., 2019). There is no parity between the number of FGCS enrolled in higher education and the number of FGCS enrolled in honors programs and colleges. This study sought to fill the literature gap by exploring the experiences of six FGCS in honors to guide professionals as their influence has a significant effect on the success of first-generation college students (McCallen & Johnson, 2020). With little literature specific to FGCS in honors, these stories and themes add a distinct perspective.

The current literature on FGCS describes them as less academically prepared and ready for college and less likely to take Advanced Placement courses (Cataldi et al., 2018); however, the FGCS study participants do not match these findings. While the literature suggests that they should be underprepared academically that was not an experience described by this population, as all the participants completed honors-type courses and academically excelled in high school. Somewhat surprisingly less instances of literature described impostor phenomena were present in

this particular population. The challenges described were more closely related to self-efficacy and academic self-concept than impostor phenomena. The participants' comments such as "wasn't smart enough," "didn't know if I was smart enough," when speaking about themselves or when comparing themselves to others, "everyone was too smart," or "still trying to get to that level" The not believing they are smart enough speaks to a lower self-efficacy, while the comments comparing their abilities to others demonstrated a lower academic self-concept, not impostor phenomenon.

First-generation college students desire to attend college to improve their families' lives (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Bauman et al., 2019). There was an expression of wanting to improve the lives of their family by the participants as expressed by Haley said she wanted "to be able to help my family, my adopted family, financially." Attending college may result in the FGCS experiencing achievement guilt, or the feeling of leaving family behind for individual pursuits (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). The participants demonstrated the influence of family on the decision to attend college. From Alondra's parents she heard, "you have to go to college." Haley's family "really pushed" her to attend college. Fiona's parents initially told her it was a possibility she could not go to college but that motivated her to "want to go even more." Absent from the participant narratives were any mention of guilt for leaving or mention of leaving their family behind. The fact that the participants' narratives did not include any guilt-related stories or discussions about leaving their families behind indicates that they possess a nuanced understanding of their own aspirations and the supportive dynamics within their families.

Whether their family explicitly or implicitly communicated the expectation to attend college, the participants knew higher education was part of their future; however, the relationships with high school teachers and counselors significantly shaped their college search

and application process. The study participants were keenly aware that their parents could not assist with many of the process and procedural aspects of attending college. Haley specifically noted that her "family obviously couldn't do so because they had never attended college. So she [high school counselor] walked me through FAFSA and scholarships and how important they were and she even taught me how to interview and things like that." Fiona "didn't really know very much what the process looked like" and relied on the connection with her physics teacher to assist her.

First-generation college students desire support from their families on the college search and the college-going experience. Still, they recognize that their families do not have the experience or knowledge to do so. The participants were aware when their continuing-generation peers had college knowledge that they lacked. Brandon said,

> compared to students who parents have been to college, whose parents have, like, these high expectations of them. So they kind of, like, know what they're going into because their parents have done it before. They're being asked questions from their parents. I, on the other hand, was like, I have no idea how this college process work or how I'm supposed to, like, you know, frustrating.

Haley recognized that due to her status as a FGCS, her social capital was not the same as others. She said, "and sometimes it can feel like they have more opportunities than you strictly because you don't know as many people." Alondra spoke to the difference in cultural capital, "they [continuing generation] have more or certain experiences."

To bridge the gap of social and cultural capital for FGCS, institutions should find means to provide support networks with information and knowledge of the college experience prior to enrollment. Engaging the families of FGCS in honors programming and inviting families to campus creates opportunities to learn together about resources that lead to student persistence and graduation (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022; McCulloh, 2022). Engagement with families cannot

end after the student is enrolled but must continue through the student's time on campus to help students maintain their family connection and mitigate the disconnection that can happen when a first-generation student goes to college (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022).

Increasing FGCS enrollment in honors is possible by elevating awareness of university honors programs and colleges to students in high school honors courses and readiness programs. Participation in high school honors, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, or college readiness/preparedness programs affects the disposition to attend and succeed in college (Diaz et al., 2019; B. J. Evans, 2019; Todhunter-Reid et al., 2020; Warren & Goins, 2019). First-generation college students benefit from increased participation in college readiness programs and high school-level honors or honors-type courses as it contributes to academic success in college (B. J. Evans, 2019). High school teachers and counselors can increase the likelihood of FGCS participating in honors by encouraging more first-generation students to participate in college readiness and preparedness programs and increasing first-generation student participation in high school honors courses. It is equally important to provide academic support and resources for first-generation students to achieve success in advanced courses and prepare them for honors courses in college.

The active learning and seminar-style courses prevalent in honors education benefits FGCS, as they allow honors faculty to provide more personalized attention and assistance to their students (Diaz et al., 2019). When a student knows their professor knows who they are, they are more likely to go to them to ask for help. The smaller classes also create a supportive peer-to-peer environment through seminar-style courses. First-generation colleges learn the social and cultural environments of honors by watching and listening to what their continuing-generation peers do and say. As the FGCS becomes more confident in their academic ability, their

participation in class discussions and other educational and social activities increases (Conefrey, 2021). A sense of belonging and self-efficacy are context-dependent, but with repeated success, FGCS learn to apply and transfer the positive effects of a higher sense of belonging and self-efficacy to novel situations and in helping other students (Conefrey, 2021; Koh et al., 2022).

Peer mentor programs help students overcome the challenges of imposter phenomena (Lee et al., 2021). They also increase student involvement, engagement, and academic integration, thereby building social and cultural capital within the students (Flores & Estudillo, 2018). Participation in a peer mentoring program creates opportunities for leadership and service for FGCS increasing social and cultural capital and providing additional academic support (Beals et al., 2021). An established and trusting relationship with peer mentors can facilitate the development of social capital to help students form meaningful connections with faculty (Flores & Estudillo, 2018). When students have someone closer to their age who can relate to what they are experiencing, they are more likely to go to them for help; the peer-to-peer connection makes it easier for students to express their challenges and concerns (Flores & Estudillo, 2018). When the benefits of honors are paired with the additional support of a peer mentoring program, it aligns and strengthens the best practices supporting FGCS's success and keeps them enrolled and persisting in college. When FGCS immerse themselves in those academic activities, honors faculty and staff can provide guidance and mentorship to help them navigate new experiences and reach their academic goals (McCallen & Johnson, 2020).

Honors programs and colleges provide a sense of community and belonging for FGCS increasing their persistence. Mentoring from faculty and peers communicates to FGCS that they matter and are wanted in the honors community. First-generation college students build meaningful relationships with their peers and honors faculty in smaller active learning courses

that prepare students to think critically and see the world differently. Honors programs and colleges benefit FGCS by helping them improve their academic self-concept and increase their self-efficacy, which provides a firm foundation for future success in their personal and professional lives. The impact of the relationships FGCS built with honors faculty and staff had a positive effect on developing help-seeking behaviors which are typically not as present in FGCS as in continuing-generation students. Developing opportunities for FGCS to cultivate relationships with faculty and staff and actively participate in honors is crucial for their academic and personal growth—serving as a solid foundation for their future success in both personal and professional endeavors.

For honors to become more inclusive, meet the needs of a wider variety of students, and reflect the demographics of the larger college population, this study, as it has sought to re-story the lives of participant FGCS, identified key implications. Honors faculty and staff must be open to knowing and understanding the background and cultural capital of FGCS—get to know who they are, why they are in college, and what they want to accomplish, personally and professionally.

Recommendation for Further Research

The structure of this research study can facilitate the continued examination of FGCS in honors. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the larger FGCS in the honors population; it can direct research design and implementation. Suggested improvements to continue the work within this study include conducting a longitudinal cohort study with multiple interviews spaced over time. Within this study, the research questions asked the participants to remember and reflect on their experiences in deciding to attend college and the honors application process; if a participant is a junior or senior, their recollections may not be as detailed

and accurate as a first-year or sophomore. Following a cohort from the beginning of their honors education allows a greater contextualization of their experiences as they would be similarly situated credit-wise within their institutions.

This study was qualitative, with data collection only occurring through virtual interviews. Minimal background information about the participants was collected through a demographic survey. The survey did not ask for high school and college courses, activities, or grade point averages. Including those data points allows for a more comprehensive analysis of participants' experiences and better situates them within the studies that include those variables. A mixed-methods study would include the Sense of Belonging Instrument and Academic Self-Efficacy Scale for Students or Bandura's General Self-Efficacy Scale. Including a quantitative component could increase the number of study participants addressing this study's reliability, validity, and generalizability challenges. The qualitative data adds context to the quantitative data, increasing the authenticity and understanding of the participant's experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The study participants were all students currently participating in honors, presenting a bias in favor of honors. Future studies should include students who withdrew from honors to present a balanced view of the honors experience. Diaz et al. (2019) found that students who had some honors participation increased the likelihood of graduation within six years over students who had no honors. Including students with some honors experience allows for exploring the effect of honors beyond time to graduation.

Exploring undermatching or whether the participants enrolled in a less rigorous university than their academic profile indicated was not within the scope of the present research study. It is unknown if the study participants undermatched or if the honors program or college

mitigated the effect of undermatching. A known consequence of undermatching is leaving before degree attainment; when writing this chapter, all the participants enrolled in their honors college or program gesturing toward a beneficial effect of honors on institutional matching (Kang & García Torres, 2021; Muskens et al., 2019). Further research should explore the relationship between undermatching, first-generation college students and honors participation.

There is limited research that includes alums of honors programs or colleges. The published studies explored the perceived value of an honors education beyond graduation; however, they did not examine if an honors education had more or less an effect on first-generation college graduates. Including first-generation college honors graduates in research is imperative to give a holistic understanding of the honors experience.

Unlike their continuing-generation counterparts, first-generation college students enter college with lower high school grade point averages (Redford & Hoyer, 2018). To be more inclusive, the National Collegiate Honors Council has suggested language to encourage students to apply regardless of grade point average; however, the high school grade point average predicted higher retention and completion in honors (Badenhausen et al., 2020; Diaz et al., 2019; McKay, 2009). Further research on how removing admissions barriers to honors affects academic outcomes for first-generation students can provide insight and direction for improving educational opportunities and not making the removal of barriers only performative.

The two Latina women both said that initially, they did not feel like they belonged in honors but eventually came to feel a sense of belonging, while the other participants did not comment on the development of a sense of belonging over time. Further study is needed to understand the role of intersecting identities on the development of a sense of belonging.

Implications for Professional Practice

In the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's (WICHE) 2020 report, the number of high school graduates is expected to peak in with the class of 2025 and begin a decline (Bransberger et al., 2020). Within higher education, the enrollment decline is commonly known as the "demographic cliff," meaning fewer students will enroll in higher education. Grawe (2018) developed the Higher Education Demand Index (HEDI) to model the demand for higher education. Grawe's projections predict a sharp decline in college-going high school graduates between 2026 and 2030, a slight increase between 2031 and 2035 before an even more significant decline between 2036 and 2043 (Grawe, 2018, 2021; Harvey, 2021).

Though the demographic cliff is a reality, the number of high school graduates who are students of color is increasing (Bransberger et al., 2020). Proportionally first-generation college students are likelier to be students of color (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Redford & Hoyer, 2018). With the enrollment decline projected to occur in two years, honors must enroll more first-generation college students, or the effects of the demographic cliff will cause a significant decline in honors enrollment.

The findings of this research study stress the importance of honors addressing in earnest recruitment and admissions strategies that are more inclusive of first-generation college students. Honors recruitment and admissions professionals should collaborate with Student Support Services and the McNair Scholars Program to comprehensively support first-generation college students. Honors, Student Support Services, and the McNair Scholars Program are all designed to support their target populations through graduation; therefore, it is a natural partnership. Professionals in honors and TRIO programs can share expertise and create best practices for honors TRIO partnerships. Shyanne participated in her institution's TRIO STEM program, which

she has found to be a “good resource.” Through TRIO STEM, Shyanne was provided with information about additional campus resources to help with food insecurity, housing, and scholarships, which she was unaware of.

Honors partnerships with TRIO programs will also increase honors awareness among underrepresented populations. The stereotypical view of honors is that it is only for the best and brightest, elitist, and more academically rigorous. The participants in this study had previous academic success and support from high school counselors, which guided them to participate in honors. It cannot be assumed that all first-generation students will come to honors with the same background. Through the development of partnerships with TRIO programs, honors can reach students who dismiss the possibility of honors because of those stereotypical views.

The removal of GPA and test scores as admissions criteria is a start to increase accessibility and equity in honors; however, that alone will not increase honors applications and subsequent enrollment (Badenhausen et al., 2020). Alondra’s participation in AVID significantly impacted her decision to attend and where she attended college. The AVID-organized visit resulted in Alondra’s eventual enrollment in the college she visited. The likelihood of students enrolling in college is increased when students are taken on college visits (Swanson et al., 2021). Honors should identify college readiness and preparedness programs to create programming and visitation opportunities for students in those types of programs. While not all students will matriculate to the university and honors program hosting the visit, their awareness of honors and the benefits of participating in honors was conveyed, giving FGCS more

Increased accessibility to honors means a more diverse student population with diverse needs. Honors professionals must lean into the adage of “teaching the students we have, not students we wish we had.” When asked what honors could do to improve the experiences of

first-generation college students in honors, Fiona said, ". . .maybe better training for faculty on how to invite and understand that not every student is starting at the same place, not every student has the same resources." A traditional view of first-generation college students was that they are "at risk" and viewed through a deficit lens (Delima, 2019). Fiona's negative experience with her honors coordinator supports the need for training to help honors professionals. It is crucial to provide professional development opportunities for honors faculty and staff, introducing them to the challenges of first-generation college students without viewing those challenges as deficits. All students should be viewed through their strengths and encouraged to use them to confront challenges (E. M. Brown et al., 2020). A strengths-based lens improves the learning environment, student self-efficacy, and retention (Soria et al., 2017).

The one overarching and all-encompassing action honors professionals can take to improve the honors experience for first-generation college students is to develop multiple opportunities for students to cultivate relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. The influence of relationships on the decision to attend college, the development of social and cultural capital, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging among first-generation college students in honors was paramount to the success of the study participants. The six students at the heart of this study knew they were valued, mattered, and seen by their honors programs and colleges. Their stories should guide the practice of every honors higher education professional to create a space of equity and belonging.

And when you come to honors, or you're part of a community like the honors program, the support and the happiness it brings you is so overwhelming that you can't do anything but succeed. I mean, it's really incredible. -Haley

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Appendix A

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College

The National Collegiate Honors Council has identified these best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors colleges.

1. An honors college incorporates the relevant characteristics of a fully developed honors program.
2. The honors college exists as an equal collegiate unit within a multi-collegiate university structure.
3. The head of the honors college is a dean reporting directly to the chief academic officer of the institution and serving as a full member of the Council of Deans if one exists. The dean has a fulltime, 12-month appointment.
4. The operational and staff budgets of honors colleges provide resources at least comparable to those of other collegiate units of equivalent size.
5. The honors college exercises increased coordination and control of departmental honors where the college has emerged out of a decentralized system.
6. The honors college exercises considerable control over honors recruitment and admissions, including the appropriate size of the incoming class. Admission to the honors college may be by separate application.
7. The honors college exercises considerable control over its policies, curriculum, and selection of faculty.
8. The curriculum of the honors college offers significant course opportunities across all four years of study.
9. The curriculum of the honors college constitutes at least 20% of a student's degree program. The honors college requires an honors thesis or honors capstone project.
10. Where the home university has a significant residential component, the honors college offers substantial honors residential opportunities.
11. The distinction achieved by the completion of the honors college requirements is publically announced and recorded, and methods may include announcement at commencement ceremonies, notations on the diploma and/or the student's final transcript, or other similar actions.
12. Like other colleges within the university, the honors college may be involved in alumni affairs and development and may have an external advisory board.
13. The college regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the National Collegiate Honors Council's *Definition of Honors Education* and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission.

Approved by the NCHC Executive Committee on June 25, 2005, and amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on February 19, 2010, further amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on June 19, 2014.

June 2017

Appendix B

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program

Although no single or definitive honors program model can or should be superimposed on all types of institutions, the National Collegiate Honors Council has identified a number of best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors programs.

1. The honors program offers carefully designed educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves. A clearly articulated set of admission criteria (e.g., GPA, SAT score, a written essay, satisfactory progress, etc.) identifies the targeted student population served by the honors program. The program clearly specifies the requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion.

2. The program has a clear mandate from the institution's administration in the form of a mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors and defines the place of honors in the administrative and academic structure of the institution. The statement ensures the permanence and stability of honors by guaranteeing that adequate infrastructure resources, including an appropriate budget as well as appropriate faculty, staff, and administrative support when necessary, are allocated to honors so that the program avoids dependence on the good will and energy of particular faculty members or administrators for survival. In other words, the program is fully institutionalized (like comparable units on campus) so that it can build a lasting tradition of excellence.

3. The honors director reports to the chief academic officer of the institution.

4. The honors curriculum, established in harmony with the mission statement, meets the needs of the students in the program and features special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options.

5. The program requirements constitute a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work, typically 20% to 25% of the total course work and certainly no less than 15%.

6. The curriculum of the program is designed so that honors requirements can, when appropriate, also satisfy general education requirements, major or disciplinary requirements, and preprofessional or professional training requirements.

7. The program provides a locus of visible and highly reputed standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.

8. The criteria for selection of honors faculty include exceptional teaching skills, the ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students, and support for the mission of honors education.

9. The program is located in suitable, preferably prominent, quarters on campus that provide both access for the students and a focal point for honors activity. Those accommodations include space for honors administrative, faculty, and support staff functions as appropriate. They may include space for an honors lounge, library, reading rooms, and computer facilities. If the honors program has a significant residential component, the honors housing and residential life functions are designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.

10. The program has a standing committee or council of faculty members that works with the director or other administrative officer and is involved in honors curriculum, governance, policy, development, and evaluation deliberations. The composition of that group represents the colleges and/or departments served by the program and also elicits support for the program from across the campus.

11. Honors students are assured a voice in the governance and direction of the honors program. This can be achieved through a student committee that conducts its business with as much autonomy as possible but works in collaboration with the administration and faculty to maintain excellence in the program. Honors students are included in governance, serving on the advisory/policy committee as well as constituting the group that governs the student association.

12. Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or staff.

13. The program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies. When proven successful, such efforts in curriculum and pedagogical development can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.

14. The program regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the National Collegiate Honors Council's *Definition of Honors Education* and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission.

15. The program emphasizes active learning and participatory education by offering opportunities for students to participate in regional and national conferences, Honors Semesters, international programs, community service, internships, undergraduate research, and other types of experiential education.

16. When appropriate, two-year and four-year programs have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year programs who meet previously agreed-upon requirements are accepted into four-year honors programs.

17. The program provides priority enrollment for active honors students in recognition of scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program(s) requirements.

Approved by the NCHC Executive Committee on March 4, 1994; amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on November 23, 2007; further amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on February 19, 2010; further amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on June 19, 2014.

Appendix C

NCHC Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

NCHC Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education

Abridged Version

Mission, Vision, Values

Mission Alignment

The honors program or college aligns itself with the mission of the institution, responds to its strategic plan and core values, and embraces student-centered practices while actively welcoming diverse faculty, professional staff, and students into its community.

Strategic Partnership

The honors program or college is part of the institution's strategic planning process.

Inclusive Excellence

The honors program or college provides a locus of visible and highly reputed standards and models of inclusive excellence for students, faculty, and professional staff across the campus. It strives to serve undergraduates drawn from all of the many campus communities and explores practices that allow it to reach the broadest and most diverse populations.

Administration

Administrative Position

Honors programs or colleges are typically situated administratively within Academic Affairs while also being uniquely positioned to build strong partnerships with Student Affairs and other administrative units across campus.

Reporting Line

The honors director or dean typically reports to the chief academic officer of the institution or appropriate designee, though institutional context may dictate variations to this approach.

Recruitment and Admission

A clearly articulated admissions philosophy and transparent admissions process reflect the larger goals and aims of the honors program or college, help identify the targeted diverse student populations, and employ a wide range of inclusive practices that ensure honors is attracting and supporting diverse student populations and serving students from, as much as possible, all majors and programs.

Retention

The honors program or college employs policies that clearly specify requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion.

Articulation Agreements

When appropriate, two-year and four-year programs have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year programs who meet previously agreed-upon requirements are accepted into four-year honors programs or colleges, which is another important method of ensuring access to honors education by diverse populations of students.

Faculty Governance

The honors program or college has a standing committee or council of faculty members that works with the dean, director, or other administrative officer (as well as with any standing honors college faculty, if applicable) on issues related to honors curriculum, governance, issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, policy, development, and evaluation deliberations, among other activities.

Student Governance

A diverse range of honors students are assured a voice in the governance and direction of the student-centered honors program or college.

Teaching & Learning

Curricular Requirements
Given the wide variety of ways students now satisfy university or college curricular requirements, honors programs and colleges benefit from as much curricular flexibility as possible.

Curricular Scope
Given the variety of honors programs and colleges across the world, students connect with honors through a variety of touchpoints, both curricular and co-curricular.

Curricular Modalities
Curricular requirements are satisfied in numerous ways, including stand-alone honors seminars (often interdisciplinary in nature), departmental honors, cross-listed classes, and honors contracts.

Inclusive Pedagogies
Not only are the voices of historically minoritized and underserved populations represented in readings and other course materials, but honors faculty also employ a wide range of inclusive teaching practices.

Departmental Honors
If an institution employs departmental honors offerings, the honors program or college has some coordinating responsibility over those offerings, since those pathways may be difficult for students to navigate without such central oversight.

Laboratory for Innovation
In fostering student-centered practices, the honors program or college serves as a campus laboratory for diverse students and faculty to experiment with pedagogical and curricular innovation.

Honors Faculty
Honors faculty are selected based on their preparation for and commitment to the pedagogy and curriculum of the program or college, their ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for diverse students, and willingness to support the mission of honors. Selection processes help support the hiring of faculty and professional staff who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, as noted in NCHC's Diversity and Inclusion Statement.

Global Orientation
Honors programs or colleges support the growing higher education emphasis on internationalization.

Regular Assessment
The honors program or college regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the NCHC's Definition of Honors Education and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission, while also acknowledging that the project at the center of honors education is transforming student lives.

Co-Curriculum

Co-curricular Opportunities
In addition to curricular offerings and programs, honors programs and colleges provide multiple, diverse opportunities for students to participate in civic engagement, leadership, cultural programs, community service, and other extra- and co-curricular activities.

Fellowships
Honors programs and colleges prepare students for additional opportunities—during undergraduate study and beyond—available through nationally competitive fellowships and scholarships, especially students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education.

Honors Community
One of the hallmarks of honors education is the community that emerges from a shared learning experience featuring honors as a potential hub on campus connecting many different units – academic and co-curricular – because honors students tend to be drawn from all majors. As a result, the institution supports this community by providing adequate financial, physical, and personnel resources.

Student Professional Development
Honors programs and colleges provide professional development opportunities for students, thereby supporting a wide array of administrative tasks, raising the visibility of honors, and improving a program or college in ways that remain authentic to students.

Infrastructure & Resources

Personnel and Budgetary Resources
The permanence and stability of honors are ensured through adequate infrastructure and resources, including an appropriate budget as well as appropriate faculty, professional staff, and administrative support when necessary.

Program Fees
While some honors programs or colleges may employ additional fees to participate in honors, such practices limit access and equity.

Honors Advising
In acknowledgment of their need to satisfy requirements for multiple programs, honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or professional staff. Additionally, when appropriate to the institutional culture, priority enrollment is provided to active honors students in recognition of the scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program requirements, as is often the case with other distinctive populations like student athletes or student veterans.

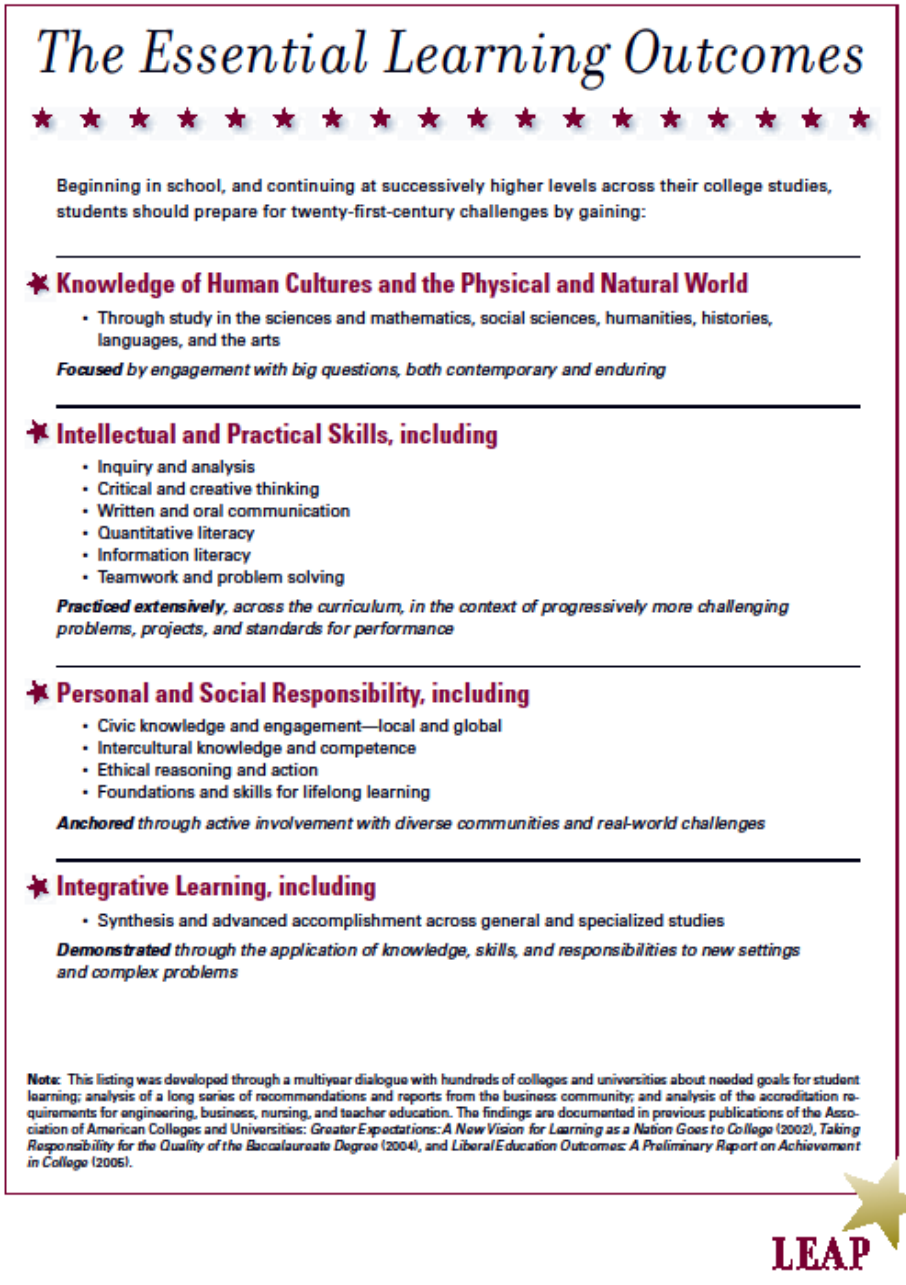
Honors Spaces
Like all units on campus, honors programs and colleges best cultivate a distinct identity and serve their diverse populations with appropriate physical spaces. Such designated locations are especially important to honors programs and colleges because their students are drawn from majors across campus and because of the important role they often play in recruiting. As a result, the institution provides adequate, accessible, and inclusive spaces that are welcoming to all honors students, faculty, professional staff, and administration.

Alumni Engagement
Because graduates often have a strong affinity for the honors program or college and its community, honors programs and colleges typically engage in robust alumni outreach through an advisory board and other mechanisms.

An unabridged version of NCHC's Shared Principles and Practices is also available.

Appendix D

The Essential Learning Outcomes



The Essential Learning Outcomes

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

***Focused** by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring*

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

***Practiced extensively**, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance*

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

***Anchored** through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges*

Integrative Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

***Demonstrated** through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems*

Note: This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Achievement in College* (2006).

LEAP

Appendix E

Principles of Excellence

The Principles of Excellence

Principle One

Aim High—and Make Excellence Inclusive

Make the Essential Learning Outcomes a Framework for the Entire Educational Experience, Connecting School, College, Work, and Life

Principle Two

Give Students a Compass

Focus Each Student's Plan of Study on Achieving the Essential Learning Outcomes—and Assess Progress

Principle Three

Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation

Immerse All Students in Analysis, Discovery, Problem Solving, and Communication, Beginning in School and Advancing in College

Principle Four

Engage the Big Questions

Teach through the Curriculum to Far-Reaching Issues—Contemporary and Enduring—in Science and Society, Cultures and Values, Global Interdependence, the Changing Economy, and Human Dignity and Freedom

Principle Five

Connect Knowledge with Choices and Action

Prepare Students for Citizenship and Work through Engaged and Guided Learning on "Real-World" Problems

Principle Six

Foster Civic, Intercultural, and Ethical Learning

Emphasize Personal and Social Responsibility, in Every Field of Study

Principle Seven

Assess Students' Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems

Use Assessment to Deepen Learning and to Establish a Culture of Shared Purpose and Continuous Improvement

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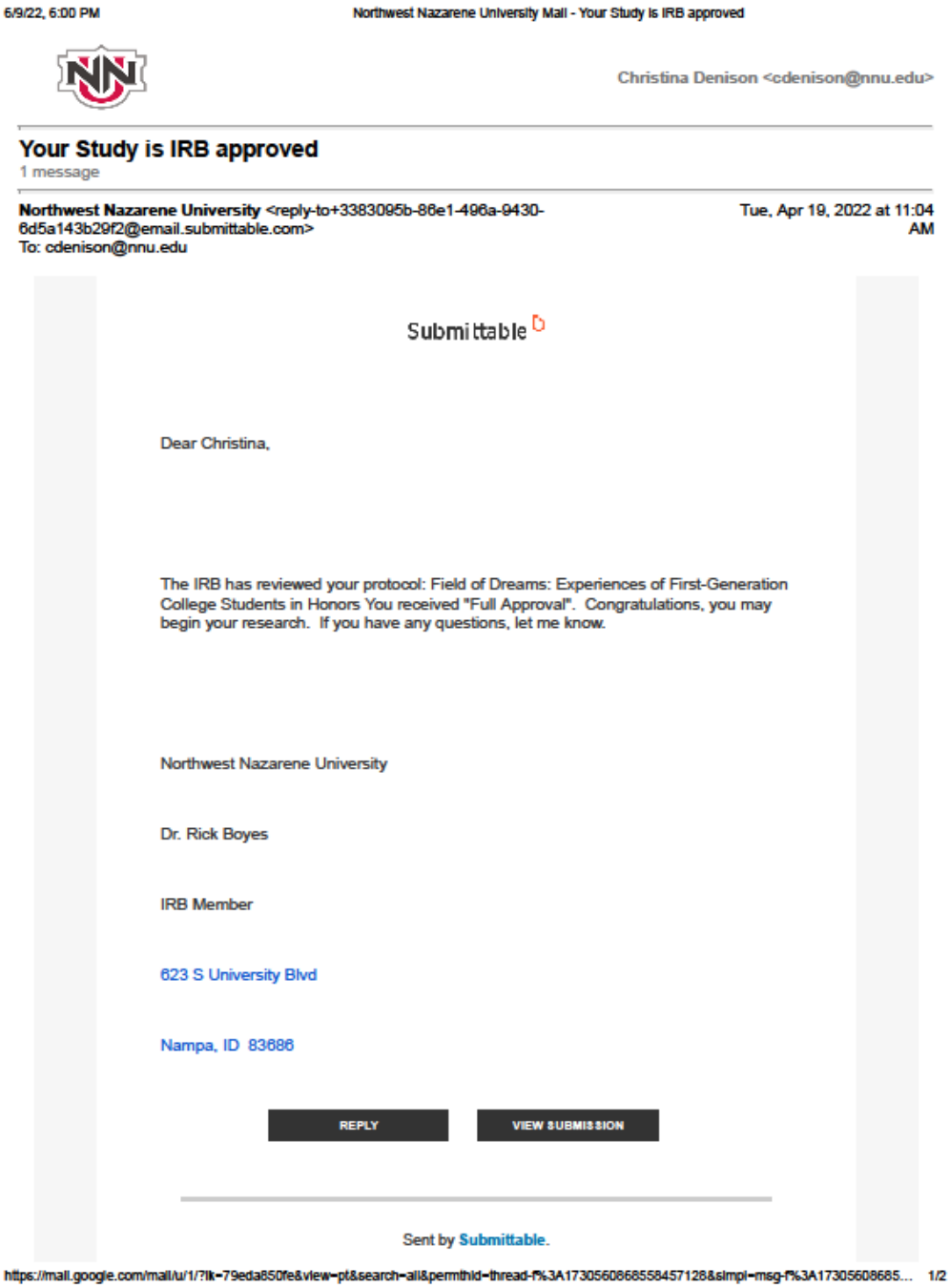
LEAP

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Permission



6/9/22, 6:00 PM Northwest Nazarene University Mail - Your Study is IRB approved

Christina Denison <cdenison@nnu.edu>

Your Study is IRB approved
1 message

Northwest Nazarene University <reply-to+3383095b-86e1-496a-9430-6d5a143b29f2@email.submittable.com>
To: cdenison@nnu.edu

Tue, Apr 19, 2022 at 11:04 AM

Submittable

Dear Christina,

The IRB has reviewed your protocol: Field of Dreams: Experiences of First-Generation College Students in Honors You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

Northwest Nazarene University

Dr. Rick Boyes

IRB Member

623 S University Blvd

Nampa, ID 83686

REPLY VIEW SUBMISSION

Sent by Submittable.

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Appendix G

Social Media Post and Message Boards

Post to NCHC Message Board (with poster attached):

Hello. I'm Christina Denison, a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. My research focuses on the experiences of first-generation college students in university honors programs or colleges. I seek to interview first-generation college students (neither parent has a four-year degree) participating in a university honors program or college. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and are expected to last 90 minutes.

If you know students who may be eligible for inclusion in my study, I would appreciate it if you would pass along my contact information. My email is cdenison@nnu.edu or [redacted]

Appendix H

Email to Higher Education Colleagues

Email to higher education colleagues

Dear (colleague),

I hope you are doing well. As you may be aware, I am working on a doctorate through Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. I have received IRB approval to begin gathering data. I am seeking participants for my study of first-generation college students participating in honors programs or colleges. Attached is a recruiting poster for participants. I was hoping you would be able to pass along my information to any students who fit the criteria.

If you have questions, please get in touch with me at cdenison@nnu.edu, or you may call me at [redacted].

I appreciate your assistance and support for this study,

Christina Denison

Appendix I

Script for Calls and Emails to Participants

Calling and receiving calls—potential participants

1a. Referred calls. Hello, my name is Christina Denison. I am a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University. I was given your name by (person referring). Do you have a moment to speak with me?

If no, go to 2
If yes, go to 3a.

Also, are you 18 years of age or older?

If no, go to 5a
If yes, go to 3a.

1b. Returning call or calls from email contact.

Hello. May I speak with XXXX?? Hello, my name is Christina Denison. I am a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University. Do you have a moment to speak with me?

If no, go to 2
If yes, go to 3a.

1c. Receiving call.

Thank you for calling me. I am a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University.

Go to 3b.

2. Okay. Is there a time that I could call you back that is more convenient? (set date and time)

3a. Great. Thank you for taking my call. I am conducting a study about the experiences of first-generation college students in honors and am hoping to set up interviews with students. I have a couple of questions to confirm your eligibility for the study.

For this research, the definition of a first-generation college student is a student whose parents did not complete a four-year degree? Using this definition, are you a first-generation college student?

If yes, go to 4
If no, go to 5a

3b. I am conducting a study about the experiences of first-generation college students in honors and am hoping to set up interviews with students. I have a couple of questions to confirm your eligibility for the study.

For this research, the definition of a first-generation college student is a student whose parents did not complete a four-year degree? Using this definition, are you a first-generation college student?

If yes, go to 4
If no, go to 5a

4. Thank you. Are you currently enrolled in the honors college or program at your university/college and completed at one year (two semesters or three quarters) in your college or program?

If yes, go to 6
If no, go to 5a

5a. Thank you for your time and speaking with me; however, you are ineligible to participate. If you would pass along my contact information to anyone who may be eligible, that would be helpful.

5b. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate you speaking with me. If you would pass along my contact information to anyone who may be eligible, that would be helpful.

6. Great! Based on your answers, you are eligible to participate. The plan is to interview you via Zoom and will last approximately 90 minutes. The interview is recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. Additionally, your name will be changed, and a pseudonym will be used in my dissertation.

Are you willing to participate in this study?

If yes, go to 7
If no, go to 5b

7. I will email you the Informed Consent Form for your review and signature. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions regarding the form. What email should I send the form to? My contact information and the contact information for my researcher supervisor will be provided in the email. The Informed Consent form also includes a demographic questionnaire for your completion. When you complete the online form and questionnaire, I will receive a notification. I will contact you to set up an appointment. You may also use the link in the survey completion message to set up the interview.

Do you have any questions for me?

Email to potential participants

Dear XXX,

My name is Christina Denison. I am conducting a study about the experiences of first-generation college students in honors and am hoping to set up interviews with students. I appreciate you emailing me. I would like to call to ask you a couple of questions to determine your eligibility for study inclusion. Would you mind sending me a few dates and times when I could call you? Alternatively, you could call me at [redacted].

I look forward to speaking with you,

Christina

When returning calls from email inquiries: use the calling script above.

Appendix J

Informed Consent & Demographic Questionnaire

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1 **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**
Study Title: Field of Dreams: Experiences of First-Generation College Students in Honors

Principal Investigator: Christina Denison, Northwest Nazarene University
cdenison@nnu.edu [redacted]

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Heidi Curtis

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Christina Denison, a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Northwest Nazarene University, is conducting a research study related to the experiences of first-generation college students in honors.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a first-generation college student over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

2. You will answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion on your experiences as a first-generation college student in honors. This discussion will be audio and videotaped and is expected to last approximately 90 minutes.

3. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to verify the accuracy of identified themes and to respond to clarifying questions, if necessary. This process should last approximately 30 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the interview questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time. If you have an urgent problem related to your participation in this study, you should contact the mental health or counseling clinic available to you at your university.

2. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. Due to the make-up of the first-generation honors population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may choose not to respond.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audiotapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet, password-protected computer, or password-protected files. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be retained for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. The primary researcher, the research supervisor, the outside committee member, and the transcriptionist will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, all parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help honors educators to better understand the factors that enhance honors education.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Christina Denison can be contacted via email at cdenison@nnu.edu or via telephone at [redacted]. If, for some reason, you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Heidi Curtis, Director of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at hlcurtis@nnu.edu via telephone at [redacted] or by writing 623 S. University Blvd, Nampa, Idaho 83686. Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to participate or not in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as an honors student at your

university.

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

☐ I consent to: participation in this study and to the audio and videotaping of the interview for this study, and the use of my direct quotes to be used in this study. (1)

☐ I do not consent to participate in this study. (4)

Signature Signature for consent

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Demographic Questionnaire

Name Participant Name

_____

Pseudonym Optional: Preferred pseudonym to be used in the study.

_____

Age What is your age?

- ❍ 18-19 (1)
- ❍ 20-21 (2)
- ❍ 22-23 (3)
- ❍ 24 or older (4)

Race/Ethnicity Which of the following best describes you? Please select one answer.

- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander (1)
- ☐ Black or African American (2)
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino (3)
- ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native (4)
- ☐ White or Caucasian (5)
- ☐ Multiracial or biracial (6)
- ☐ A race or ethnicity not listed here (7)
- ☐ Prefer not to answer (8)

Gender Which best describes your gender?

- ❍ Female (1)
- ❍ Male (2)
- ❍ Transgender (3)
- ❍ Do not identify as female, male, or transgender (4)
- ❍ Prefer not to answer (5)

Household Members Before you came to college, who lived in your household?

_____

Social Standing Please mark the rung that best represents where you think you stand on the ladder. At the top of the ladder are people who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who have the least money, least education, worst jobs, or no job.

Regional Description Which best describes the region you lived in prior to coming to college?

- ❍ Urban (1)
- ❍ Suburban (2)
- ❍ Rural (3)
- ❍ Remote (4)

Class Standing What is your class standing?

- ❍ First-year (1)
- ❍ Sophomore (2)
- ❍ Junior (3)
- ❍ Senior (4)

Major What is your major?

_____

End of Block: Demographic Questionnaire

End of Survey

Thank you for submitting your Informed Consent form and Demographic Questionnaire. I will contact you to set up an interview. You may also use this link to set up the interview at a time that is convenient for you.

Christina E. Denison ${date://CurrentDate/FL}

Appendix K

Pilot Study Anonymous Feedback Form

Denison Pilot Study Feedback

Start of Block: Thank you

Q1 Thank you for participating in the pilot study for Christina Denison's research, Field of Dreams: Experiences of First-Generation College Students in Honors. Your feedback helps Ms. Denison improve her interview skills and refine the interview questions to improve the overall quality of her study. Your anonymized comments are shared with Ms. Denison; however, she will not have access to your responses.

Q2 The interview questions were easy to understand.

- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ Somewhat (2)
- ❍ No (3)

Q3 If you answered "somewhat" or "no" to Q2, what questions were not easy to understand? Please reference them by number and provide suggestions for improvement. They are attached for your review. Interview questions

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q4 During the interview, my level of comfort was

- ❍ Extremely comfortable (1)
- ❍ Somewhat comfortable (2)
- ❍ Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
- ❍ Somewhat uncomfortable (4)
- ❍ Extremely uncomfortable (5)

Q5 If you were uncomfortable, what could Ms. Denison have done to increase your comfort level?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q6 The length of the interview was

- ❍ Too long (1)
- ❍ Just right (2)
- ❍ Too short (3)

Q7 Ms. Denison was attentive and listened to my responses.

- ❍ Strongly agree (1)
- ❍ Somewhat agree (2)
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ❍ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ❍ Strongly disagree (5)

Q9 What could she do to improve?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q10 Is there anything Ms. Denison should have asked but didn't?

_____

End of Block: Thank you

Appendix L

Protocol Changes

1. Contacted honors professionals at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference to identify possible study participants.

2. Reduced interview length from 90 minutes to 35 minutes after the conclusion of the pilot study.

Appendix M

Interview Protocol with List of Interview Questions

Intro	Introduce interviewer. Thank the interviewee for agreeing to participate. Give brief background, including a disclosure that the researcher was a first-generation college student and currently works in honors. Review the signed Informed Consent form.
Q1	What experiences in high school did you have that led to your decision to attend college?
Q2	What person was most influential in your decision, and how did they affect your decision?
Q3	How did your family influence your decision to attend college?
Q4	What other schools did you consider before choosing XXXX?
Q5	Why did you choose XXXX?
Q6	If invited: What were your feelings/thoughts about being invited to apply to your honors program/college?
Q7	Would you please explain the application process you went through to enroll in the honors program/college?
Q8	At any time, did you worry you wouldn't be accepted?
Q9	What were the reasons you told yourself you wouldn't be accepted?
Q10	How'd you feel when you received your acceptance letter?
Q11	What did you do to prepare for participating in honors?
Q12	Did you participate in a new student or first year orientation for honors? If yes: What was that experience like? If no: Do you believe you "missed out" by not attending?
Q13	As a first-generation student, did the orientation provide you with the information and support you needed to be successful in your first year and beyond?
Q14	Tell me about walking into your first honors course. How did you feel on that first day?
Q15	At any time during your honors experiences, have you felt out of place because you are first-generation? Tell me about that/those experience(s).
Q16	Can you identify an experience in honors where you felt your peers who had parents who attended college benefited you?
Q17	Why do you continue to participate in honors?
Q18	Belonging is defined as "a feeling of connectedness and social support on campus leading to feelings of acceptance, respect, and value by others.
Q19	Do you feel you belong in honors?
Q20	If yes, who or what within honors has made you feel most welcome and that you belonged? If no, can you explain or identify why you feel you don't belong?
Q21	Tell me about an experience you've had in honors that affirmed your decision to attend college and participate in honors.
Q22	Have you ever considered leaving honors? Why? What made you stay?
Q23	What challenges have you faced as a first-generation college student in honors?
Q24	What could your college do to help you with those challenges?

Q25	How have your honors experience shaped your overall university experience?
Q26	Would you recommend honors for other first-generation college students? If yes, why? If no, why not?
Q27	What can your honors college do to improve the experiences of first-generation students?
Q28	Is there anything you would like to share with me about your honors experience?
End	Thank you for answering my questions and sharing your experiences with me. This interview will be transcribed. I will send you a copy and ask you to verify the accuracy of the transcript and our discussion. If you have any questions, you may contact me at cdenison@nnu.edu or [redacted]. You may also contact Dr. Heidi Curtis, my faculty supervisor, at hlcurtis@nnu.edu or [redacted]. Thank you again.

Appendix N

Theme Checking Email to Participants

Email to participants:

Thank you for participating in my research study. I am sending you the themes I identified from the research study interviews. As the themes were identified based on all the interviews conducted, there may be themes that do not wholly describe your individual experience. I welcome your input as to the accuracy of the themes.

Your experiences are valuable in shaping honors education for first-generation students. For this study, you are identified as XXX. Where I directly quoted you in connection with a theme, please let me know if it is not used accurately or in the context you meant.

You may send any comments to me at this email (cdenison@nnu.edu), or if you prefer, my phone number is [redacted]

Best,

Christina

Appendix O

Confidentiality Agreements: Outside Committee Member & Transcriptionist

Confidentiality Agreement (Outside Committee Member)

I, [redacted], outside committee member, agree to maintain full confidentiality regarding all video and audio recordings and documentation received from the principal researcher, Christina Denison, related to her research study titled, "Field of Dreams: Experiences of First-Generation College Student in Honors."

I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential. I will not discuss or share any of the research information with anyone other than with the principal researcher.

2. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession. Specifically, I will comply with the researcher's instructions about requirements to physically and/or electronically secure records (including password protection, file/folder encryption, and/or use of secure electronic transfer of records through file sharing, use of virtual private networks, etc.).

3. Not allow any personally identifiable information to which I have access to be accessible to anyone outside of the research team (unless specifically instructed otherwise in writing by the researcher).

4. I will inform the researcher immediately of any potential data breaches so that they can address the situation promptly.

5. Return all research information to the researcher when I have completed the research tasks or upon request, whichever is earlier. After completing the research tasks or upon request, destroy all research information regarding this research project that is not returnable to the researcher after consulting with the researcher to obtain specific instructions.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the video and audio recordings and/or files to which I have access.

Research assistant's name (printed): [redacted]

Address: [redacted]

Phone number: [redacted]

Outside Com. Member signature: [redacted] Date: 2/26/22

Researcher's name: Christina Denison

Researcher's signature: [redacted] Date: 4.10.22

Confidentiality Agreement (Research Assistant – Transcriptionist)

I, [redacted], research assistant – transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality regarding all video and audio recordings and documentation received from the principal researcher, Christina Denison, related to her research study titled, "Field of Dreams: Experiences of First-Generation College Student in Honors."

I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential. I will not discuss or share any of the research information with anyone other than with the principal researcher.

2. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession. Specifically, I will comply with the researcher's instructions about requirements to physically and/or electronically secure records (including password protection, file/folder encryption, and/or use of secure electronic transfer of records through file sharing, use of virtual private networks, etc.).

3. Not allow any personally identifiable information to which I have access to be accessible to anyone outside of the research team (unless specifically instructed otherwise in writing by the researcher).

4. I will inform the researcher immediately of any potential data breaches so that they can address the situation promptly.

5. Return all research information to the researcher when I have completed the research tasks or upon request, whichever is earlier. After completing the research tasks or upon request, destroy all research information regarding this research project that is not returnable to the researcher after consulting with the researcher to obtain specific instructions.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the video and audio recordings and/or files to which I have access.

Research assistant's name (printed): [redacted]

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

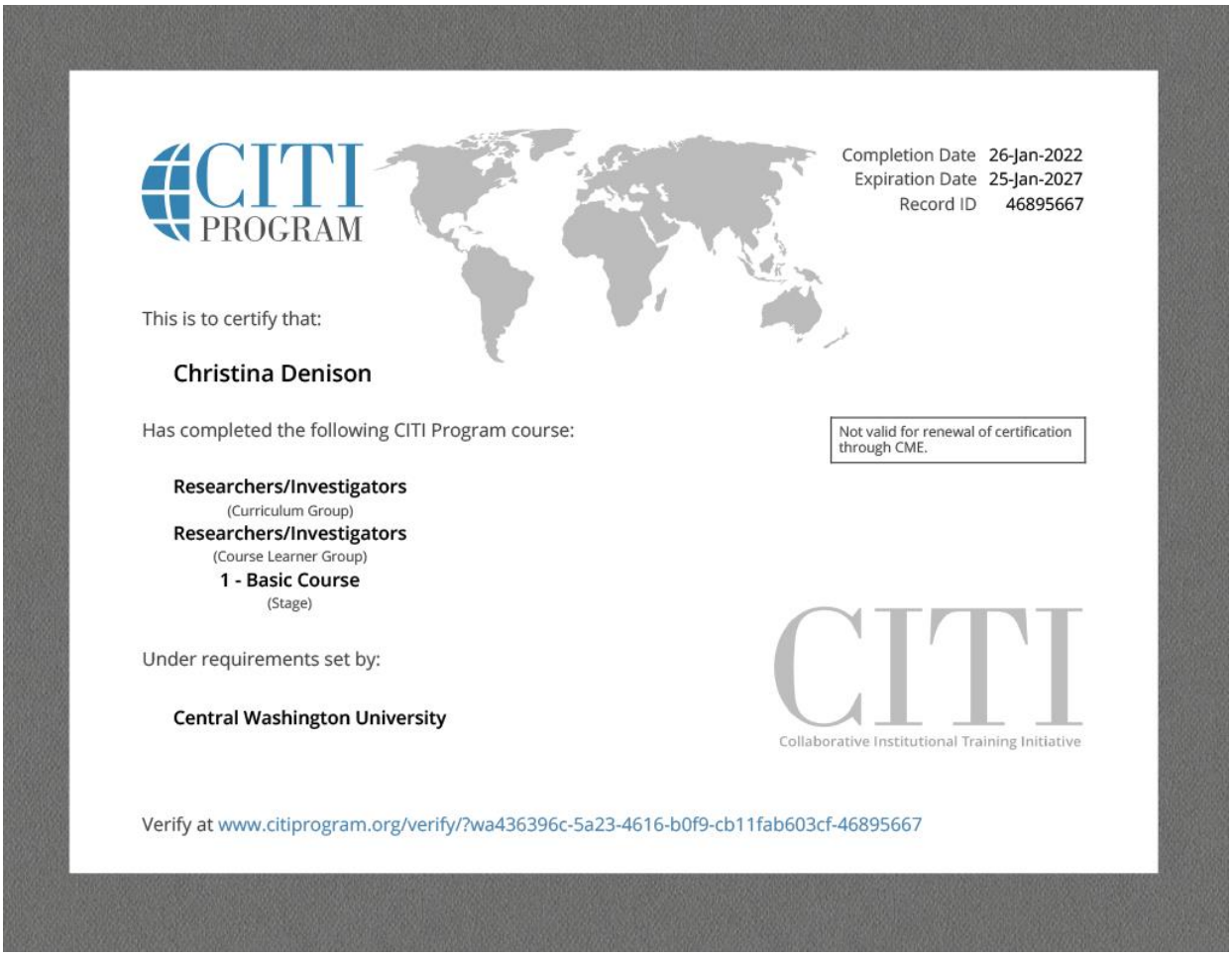
Research assistant's signature: [redacted] Date: Apr 12, 2022

Researcher's name: Christina Denison

Researcher's signature: [redacted] Date: 4.12.22

Appendix P

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certificate



CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 26-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 25-Jan-2027
Record ID 46895667

This is to certify that:

Christina Denison

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Researchers/Investigators
(Curriculum Group)
Researchers/Investigators
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Central Washington University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wa436396c-5a23-4616-b0f9-cb11fab603cf-46895667

Appendix Q

Permission to Use Tables and Figures

Re: Permission to Use Tables and Figures

CA Cognard-Black, Andrew <ajcognardblack@smcm.edu>
To Christina Denison

Reply | Reply All | Forward | ...
Wed 6/8/2022 12:38 AM

You replied to this message on 6/8/2022 8:12 AM.
Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

Caution: This email originated from outside the university.
Do not click on links, open attachments, or reply unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. If you consider this email as phishing or spam please use the **Report Suspicious - PhishAlarm Button** in Outlook or OWA to inform both the CWU Service Desk and Proofpoint.

Hi Christina,

That's an important subject. I have looked at other underrepresented groups, but data and definitions of first-gen are a little trickier and so I haven't tackled that yet. What is the timeline for completion of your dissertation?

Yes, both of those things are my work, and you have my permission to use the graph for your dissertation. If it's separated from the write-up, though, make sure to include a note about the fact that it demonstrates a pattern of growth rather than identifying the exact number of honors colleges in any given year. Because of non-response, it understates the true number of honors colleges.

If you go to publish anywhere else, please check back about permissions. There may be something more recent to use by that point.

Are you asking permission to use the table in its entirety, or just to cite specific numbers from that first page?

Also, have you seen my JNCHC article with Rick Scott and Patricia Smith? I'm on vacation and away from my computer, but as I recall we cover some more ground on those data in that article. You also might be interested in my 2021 JNCHC article with Art Spisak on diversity in honors.

Best, Andrew

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