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## **A Basic Qualitative Research Study: How Marginalized Students' Ability to Succeed Is Impacted During Freshman and Sophomore Years in College**

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Basic Qualitative Research Study: How Marginalized Students' Ability to Succeed Is Impacted  
During Freshman and Sophomore Years of College.

Ronald Eugene Gordon, Jr.  
Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Higher Education

Christopher Maddox, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2018

## **Abstract**

The transition between high school and college is inconsistent and uncertain. Many marginalized students do not understand how to seek out assistance without guidance and mentorship. Although the number of marginalized college students enrolled in 4-year colleges in the United States is growing, many marginalized college students struggle to find and maintain a sense of stability during their first 2 years of college. The problem is marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them or they do not know how to ask for help. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study is to explore what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during their freshman and sophomore years of college. In order for change to happen all levels of leadership amongst colleges should acknowledge the issues and strive to answer questions such as: What support systems and resources are available to increase success? How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems during their freshman and sophomore years in college? In this basic qualitative research study 11 participants who graduated in 2015 or 2016 from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. participated in a confidential Qualtrics survey responding to questions about their experiences at a 4-year college during their first 2 years of college. Of the participants, 91% stated one of the substantial obstacles they faced when transitioning from high school to college was a lack of intentional mentorship. As the number of marginalized students in college continues to grow, the necessity for relative mentorship will continue to increase, which means 4-year colleges in the U.S. should consider finding ways to empower marginalized students with intentional and useful mentorship to sustain their education towards earning a bachelor's degree.

*Keywords:* marginalized, poverty, student of color, first-generation, success

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to present and future college students who come from backgrounds of marginalization culturally, economically, and experiencedly. Do not be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. Please continue to break through the biases, stereotypes, and unknowns of higher education. If I can do it, surely each of you can do it too. The following research is intended to spark an awakening to the necessity of commitment, mentorship, and transformation to positively influence the success of students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students during their first 2 years of college.

## **Acknowledgments**

The dissertation experience has been a voyage into uncharted waters and would not have been possible without the communication, guidance, and patience of my dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Maddox; thank you for your commitment and constant willingness to inspire me to value my place in the academic world. Also, thank you to Dr. Bonds and Dr. Williams for not only serving as committee members, but also constantly sparking life into me as an educator and researcher. Your expertise, compassion, and humanity, kindled the support I needed to finish this voyage.

To all my students past and present, thank you for simply being yourselves. Each of you has played an influential role in my journey as a man of faith. Because of each one of you, I am more cultured, a better listener, and a compassionate educator. To my family members especially Bill, Greg, Ebany, Jim, Mom, Aron, Melia, Sanndra, Car, Cameron, Dad, Lisa, Sona, Dre, Kaleb, Dharma, Michelle, Emiko, the Herds, the Hymans, and my Mount Olympus family, thank you a thousand times over. Thank you for understanding when I did not find time to call, thank you for understanding when all I wanted to do was relax, and thank for respecting, supporting, and valuing my educational journey.

Finally, to my attentive, warm-hearted, and graceful other half. Callie, you are the moment which I live in. When I was frustrated with this voyage, you reminded me the little things make the big picture. Thank you for being a constant in my life, it means more than my words can express. You are the epitome of unconditional love and unwavering service. Lastly, all glory goes to His Imperial Majesty, the Father, the creator of life, the giver of breath.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

At many high schools throughout the Pacific Northwest Region of the United States, students have access to numerous support programs to assure their success. Some of these programs may include: College Bound, the College Success Foundation Achievers Program, TRiO, and Upward Bound. Support programs such as College Bound, the College Success Foundation Achievers Program, TRiO, and Upward Bound are college readiness programs that identify, enroll, and empower first-generation and marginalized students to pursue higher education. Each of these college readiness programs was set up by the federal government, local government, or private donors in order to grant first-generation and marginalized students the opportunity to make their pursuit of higher education tangible. However, not all students understand how to access these services when transitioning from high school to college. The dropout rate for marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges in the U.S. continues to rise; according to Camera (2015) Caucasian college students graduated at a rate of 64%, compared to a 50% graduation rate for marginalized students.

Within this basic qualitative research study, I explored what impacted marginalized students' ability to succeed academically and socially during freshman and sophomore years of college at a private or public 4-year college. Brown, Gielen, Gibbons, and Kuriansky (2017) stated the number of marginalized students enrolled in private and public 4-year colleges has gradually grown throughout time. Yet, the number of marginalized students who graduated from private and public colleges has not increased. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the Background, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study, Definitions, Assumptions and Delimitations of this basic qualitative research study.

## **Background**

Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) stated a marginalized student has a cultural or linguistic disadvantage, deprived access, disenfranchised social-class, or underrepresented racial background. According to Williams (2014) the number of marginalized students pursuing 4-year college degrees at private and public colleges has grown throughout the past 25 years. The focus must be on empowering marginalized students once they arrive on college campuses (Williams, 2014). Students should be exposed to all of the support systems and resources available to them on a campus. Though the availability may vary depending on the 4-year college, many 4-year colleges have readily available resources to help all students such as academic advising, dormitory living, minority affairs, tutorial centers, and writing centers, yet because most marginalized students are first-generation students, they do not have the insight to access the available resources at their college.

Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) believed it is the duty of all levels of leadership within the college institution to empower marginalized to be successful during their college experience. According to Schmuck et al. social interactions and recreational activities empower marginalized students adapt and ease into their transition as college students. According to Quaye and Harper (2015), as more and more marginalized students begin to enroll in college, creating an engaging campus environment will become a difficult task for 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) suggested that it is the college's duty to build a welcoming campus environment where all students need to feel accepted, especially marginalized students. Quaye and Harper stated colleges have an academic, ethical, moral duty to change policies and procedures to support marginalized students' success.

A portion of the college experience lies within the contexts of teaching, learning, and research, yet those three facets alone are not the sole reasoning for the existence of private and public 4-year colleges. Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) and Williams (2014) stated marginalized students should have equitable opportunity to interact with students including other students classified as marginalized, along with administrators, alumni, community members, faculty, and staff of their college. Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, and Vick (2017) surmised the lived experience gives marginalized students a sense of hope, motivation, and persistence. Yet, if marginalized students do not have the opportunity to connect, find, or interact with administrators, alumni, community members, faculty, or staff that share similar lived experiences, marginalized students are prone to feel a sense of doubt or disconnection to their college experience (Benitez et al., 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the population of self-identified Students of Color enrolled in college full-time grew almost 40% from September 1976 to September 2014. This number is expected to gradually increase over time. Although some marginalized students chose to use the assistance offered to them from administrators, counselors, and teachers during their high school experience, those same students did not apply these services during their first-year in college. The transition between high school and college is inconsistent, new, and uncertain. Many marginalized students do not understand how to seek assistance without intentional guidance and mentorship. The problem is marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them or they do not know how to ask for help.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study is to explore how marginalized students' ability to succeed is impacted during freshman and sophomore years of college. Freshman and sophomore college students face challenges such as adapting to cultural awareness, utilizing resources, and adjusting to new environments. Though the number of marginalized college students is on the rise, many of these students struggle to find and maintain a sense of stability academically and socially during their first 2 years of college. Marginalized students do not understand how to take advantage of the help offered to them or they do not comprehend how to ask for assistance.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

1. What impacts marginalized students' ability to be successful during freshman and sophomore years in college?
2. How do high school experiences impact marginalized students' freshman and sophomore years in college?
3. What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?
4. What challenges impacted marginalized freshmen and sophomore student success in college?
5. How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems and resources during their freshman and sophomore years in college?
6. What support systems and resources are available for marginalized freshman and sophomore students on college campuses?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Baxter and Jack (2008) asserted a holistic understanding of a research topic can be studied through the methodology of qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) said using basic qualitative research study derives from the belief that people build knowledge by engaging and constructing the meaning of an activity or experience. A central theme of qualitative research is that individuals establish a correspondence to their social world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout the process of a basic qualitative research study the researcher is attentive to comprehending the meaning a phenomenon for those involved in study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell human beings construct meaning of the world they are living in through engagement and interpretation of their experiences. Merriam and Tisdell believed the researcher conducting a basic qualitative research study should be interested in how people interpret their experiences, how people construct their worlds, and what meaning people attribute to their experiences. The general goal of a basic qualitative research study is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences. The significance of this study explored the ability of marginalized students to be successful during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

The number of marginalized students enrolled in private and public 4-year colleges in the U.S. is on the rise, yet the issue that continues to hinder progress is the ability of marginalized students to earn their bachelor's degree. In this basic qualitative research study, I explored the significance of marginalized freshmen and sophomore college students' experiences during their first or second year of college. I explored how significant positive experiences and challenges impacted marginalized freshman and sophomores in college, and how marginalized freshman

and sophomores utilized their support systems during their first and second year of college at a 4-year private or public college in the U.S.

### **Definitions**

The following are discussed terms within this dissertation to help the reader understand intent and meaning:

*Cultural Awareness:* A consciousness of the struggles of racial minority groups as they have worked to gain equity and equality on college campuses across the U.S. (Doan, 2011).

*First-generation student:* Any college student whose parents did not graduate from college (Smith, A., 2015).

*Marginalized student:* A college student with a cultural or linguistic disadvantage, deprived access, disenfranchised social-class, or underrepresented racial background (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014).

*Student of color:* Any college student whose ethnicity is not classified as Caucasian (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

*Student of poverty:* The extent to which a college student does without necessary resources that influence academic achievement such as financial, emotional, spiritual, physical, support systems, and role models (Payne, 2003).

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

According to Creswell (2013), a methodological assumption is made when the researcher assumes the methods used during the approach of qualitative research. Freshman and sophomores in college face challenges such as adapting to cultural awareness, utilizing resources, and adjusting to new environments. According to Maramba and Velasquez (2012), marginalized students need to have access to more support systems and resources during their



freshman and sophomore years in college than students that are not considered marginalized.

Before completing the process of this basic qualitative research study, I assumed all marginalized students who participated in this basic qualitative research study would define success similarly, needed the same kind of extra support to be successful, and all marginalized students struggled to be successful during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

According to a Yazan (2015), delimitation is the defining characteristic of qualitative research, or a component which there are boundaries. A delimitation of this basic qualitative research study was limited to marginalized students who graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. in 2015 or 2016. Each of the participants transitioned to college the fall which followed their high school graduation. The focus of this study was limited to the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey which prompted participants about their experiences during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

### **Summary**

At many high schools throughout the Pacific Northwest Region of the United States, students have access to numerous support programs to assure their success. However, not all students understand how to access these services when transitioning from high school to college. The transition between high school and college is often difficult and unknown for freshman and sophomore college students, especially marginalized students. Finding a sense of cultural belonging, learning how to utilize student resources, and adjusting to new environments are challenges marginalized students experience to be successful during their freshman and sophomore years in college. Despite the growth in the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges throughout the U.S., the graduation rate of marginalized students has not increased.

This study was limited to marginalized students who graduated in 2015 or 2016 from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S; each of the participants transitioned to college in September following their high school graduation. The problem is marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them or they do not know how to ask for help. Despite the growth in the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges throughout the U.S., the graduation rate of marginalized students has not increased. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during freshman and sophomore years in college. Within Chapter 2, I will review the Literature Review, Literature Search Strategy, Conceptual Framework, and Review of Research Literature for this basic qualitative research study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Retaining college students beyond their first year is a struggle at many private and public 4-year colleges in the United States. According to Williams (2014), the remediation rate for freshman in college may be as high as 50–60%, while only 42% of African American college students, a subgroup of the marginalized student population, earned their degree. Extra support is necessary such as supplementary tutoring, school-sponsored events, as well as academic courses which promote engagement within the college community. Cassleman (2014) noted throughout the past 25 years a greater number of marginalized students have enrolled in 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. Despite the notion that some marginalized students were equipped with resources in high school, without guidance and mentorship, many students continue to struggle in utilizing their resources in a new environment such as college (Williams, 2014). Some of those students will terminate their education within the first year of their college experience due to their lack of understanding of how to utilize resources in college such as writing centers, tutorial centers, the Office of Student Life, and the Office of Minority Affairs.

Chapter 2 consists of the Literature Review, Literature Search Strategy, Conceptual Framework, and Review of Research Literature. Throughout Chapter 2, I will share the literature search strategy and discuss theorists Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Ruby Payne. Lastly, I will include literature which will examine the prosperity of private and public 4-year colleges in meeting the needs of students of color and students of poverty during their first 2 years as a college student.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For this study, I searched for referenced articles through the databases of Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ERIC. The Concordia University-Portland online library was used to access both

EBSCO and ERIC. Some of the terms used in Google Scholar, and the EBSCO and ERIC databases included: *first-year college student success, students of color success in college, students of poverty success in college, student success in college, sustainability of students of color in college, the sustainability of students of poverty in college, empowering students of color in college, empowering students of poverty in college, college student struggle, how to retain first-year college students, how to retain college students, dropout rates in college, and the achievement gap at colleges in the U.S.* Information was presented through Google Scholar, as well as the EBSCO and ERIC databases. Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ERIC prompted sufficient data searches to build a literature review. Primary research results ranged from a focus on students of poverty, college access for students of color, and the sustainability of historically marginalized students at 4-year colleges within the United States.

Beyond the Concordia University online library system, Pacific Lutheran University's library catalog was used to find additional resources such as books and online journals. The use of Pacific Lutheran University's library database, along with Concordia University's online library allowed for peer-reviewed sources to be found on topics such as: *first-year college student success, students of color success in college, students of poverty success in college, student success in college, sustainability of students of color in college, the sustainability of students of poverty in college, empowering students of color in college, empowering students of poverty in college, college student struggle, how to retain first-year college students, how to retain college students, dropout rates in college, and the achievement gap at colleges in the U.S.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

Duchan (2006) and Antonenko (2015) proclaimed that a conceptual framework should serve as a map and lens for the researcher to connect to the quest of the researcher's journey.

Antonenko stated the conceptual framework equips the researcher with instruments which conceptualize key factors, variables, and concepts piece by piece to relevant theories and constructs; he referred to the significance of the conceptual framework through the trifecta of inquiry; including the context of practice, theory, and methodology, which in turn supports the conceptual framework in studies such as this basic qualitative research study. Both Duchan and Antonenko asserted that connecting the research problem to existing theories and data provided a rationale for research. Antonenko declared another way of creating the conceptual framework in a dissertation is aligning components that are grounded in research.

In order to fully understand the struggles and triumphs of marginalized college students, I examined the theory of child development through the lens of Jean Piaget (1929), Lev Vygotsky (1962), and Ruby Payne (2003). Piaget and Vygotsky are two theorists who each spent 3 decades researching the early stages of childhood development through the field of psychology. Payne is considered a modern day educational theorist who studied the impact poverty plays in the development of children.

Jean Piaget (1959) was a biologist and psychologist who spent his life studying the early lives of children. Piaget worked in child psychology for 6 decades to strengthen the four stages of mental development he identified in children—the sensorimotor stage, the pre-operation stage, concrete operational stage, and the formal operations stage (Piaget, 1959).

According to Piaget (1959) the sensorimotor stage is the first stage of cognitive development children experience. Piaget stated the sensorimotor stage begins at birth and lasts until children are between the ages of 18 months and 2 years old. During the sensorimotor stage knowledge is limited, because children have few physical interactions and experiences. Throughout this phase children experience life through constant trial and error, which happens

often by playing with toys and placing objects in their mouth. As children become mobile, their ability to develop cognitively grows, because it afforded them the opportunity for more physical interactions and experiences (Piaget, 1959). Children also develop early language skills during throughout the sensorimotor stage.

Piaget (1959) referred to the second stage of cognitive development as the preoperational stage. This stage usually materializes for children between the ages of 18 months to 7 years old. During the preoperational stage children employ language, memory, and imagination in their development. Piaget believed children use their imagination in order to comprehend and connect between the past and future.

The third stage of cognitive development in Piaget's theory is the concrete operational stage. Piaget (1959) stated between the ages of seven to 11 years old children develop intellectually by use of logic, while also learning how to manipulate symbols that are correlated to concrete objects. During the concrete operational stage, the awareness of children becomes to enlarge with the awareness of external events, which connect to concrete experiences and references (Piaget, 1959).

The final stage of cognitive development according to Piaget's (1959) theory is the formal operational stage. Piaget stated that this stage begins at adolescence and continues throughout adulthood. According to Piaget, both adolescences and adults use symbols linked to abstract concepts in order to learn. Throughout the formal operational stage adolescence can think in multiple ways, formulate hypotheses, and speculate the relationships between abstract concepts. Jean Piaget believed intellectual development is a lifelong undertaking for all human beings.

The views of Piaget (1959) are that of a constructivist theory; Piaget defined constructivists as people who use their environment and preexisting experiences to shape their own knowledge. He believed schema to be an essential building block for the development of cognition. Schema is defined by Piaget as a format of action and thought where an idea is later displayed through action. Piaget asserted throughout a child's lifetime, the child experiences living or being introduced to new environments on a constant basis, which in turn prompts the child's schema to change, grow, combine, and regenerate. As a child grows, so does their own ways of thinking. Piaget stated as a child matures, the child learns how to compare items, along with heightening their abilities to problem-solve on differing levels, depending on how much each individual child has developed their own schema.

According to Piaget (1959), an individual's extensive experience within one's environment is important to everyone's cognitive development. If children are limited during interaction within their own environment it limits their cognitive development (Piaget, 1959). If cognitive development is limited, a child will not develop at the same rate as some of their counterparts who are allowed the opportunity to fully immerse themselves into their environment. As a theorist Piaget's background in biology played a role in his theories of child psychological development. He also said people seek to understand, yet comprehension is never fully achieved during an individual's life. Piaget spent 6 decades continuously researching the development of children and in their natural environment.

Many marginalized students have limited experience in the realm of college. Most of their parents and grandparents did not attend college, therefore marginalized students experience within the environment of college are limited or nonexistent. Piaget (1959) noted an experience within an individual's environment is important to cognitive development, therefore if a

marginalized student did not experience the realities of college through the experience of their own environment, their immersion into college will be an entirely new experience.

Another theorist who explored child development and psychology was Vygotsky (1978); his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) considered the cycles of the maturation process that have already taken place within the development of children, while also considering the parts of a child's development that has not yet matured or developed. \ Vygotsky believed children learn the most through social interaction. Vygotsky asserted the notion that if a child builds a difficult puzzle, the child may become easily defeated and not finish the puzzle. Whereas if a child works with a parent or teacher, they empower the young person through actions and words, which was why Vygotsky (1962) firmly insisted the importance of a child's interaction during their cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) stated modeled behaviors from interactions with a more skilled adults leads to cooperative and collaborative dialogue, which helps the child internalize information to guide and regulate their performance during cognitive development.

While Piaget (1959) said cognitive development amongst children was fairly universal across cultures, Vygotsky (1962) sensed a child's cognitive development was widely predicated due to an individual's cultural upbringing. Vygotsky was a psychologist whom began his initial research in 1925. Social interaction amongst children leads to changes in their behavior and the notion that children's behaviors vary from culture to culture. Vygotsky believed memory in younger children is limited by biological factors, yet a child's cultural upbringing determines the development of their strategies for developing memory.

Vygotsky (1978) stated as a child grows to become more competent, it is the duty of the parents in the child's life to allow the child to work more independently, which leads to the child using what Vygotsky referred to as a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Vygotsky alluded to



the MKO as one of the child's peers, rather than a teacher or an adult. Vygotsky surmised an MKO is simply an individual that has a better understanding or a more in-depth capability of understanding than the child.

Language development is another facet of cognitive development Vygotsky (1978) believed that is developed through social interactions and purposes for communication. According to Vygotsky (1962), language plays two important roles in the cognitive development of a child: (a) it is the means which an adult transmits information to a child (b) language is a powerful tool for the intellectual adaptation of a child. Vygotsky (1962) stated there are three different forms of language which happen throughout cognitive development: social speech, private speech, and silent inner speech. Social speech usually starts around 2 years old and consists of external communication used to talk with others, whereas private speech begins at 3 years old and last until 7 years of age. During cognitive development private speech is directed to the self and forges intellectual function and growth within children. Silent inner speech begins at 7 years old and develops as a non-auditable function which internalizes speech and enables cognitive development in children.

The biggest difference between Vygotsky and Piaget was each theorist's stance in the spectrum of cognitive development. Piaget (1959) stated a child's sense of self-discovery came from a child's experiences, while Vygotsky (1962) expressed a child's upbringing influenced self-discovery. Piaget affirmed the main contributor to a child's development was how the child experienced life, whereas Vygotsky asserted a child's development happened through interaction with others, along with the guidance of parents, teachers, and other prominent people in the child's life. Vygotsky referred to this sense of development as an important measure, he connected with the Zone of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other

(Vygotsky, 1978). For many marginalized students, the only individuals in their early life that experienced college were their teachers. Lack of access during the ZPD for marginalized students plays a role in their uncertainty about college, nevertheless what it takes to experience college successfully. One similarity between Piaget and Vygotsky was their shared belief that children by nature are curious and play a role in their own sense of discovery and development in creating their own schema (Vygotsky, 1962). Like Piaget and Vygotsky, Ruby Payne (2003) has spent 3 decades studying in the field of education. Payne is known in educational academia for her research in relation to education and poverty in the U.S.

One aspect of everyday life which empowers students of poverty to not allow the cycle of generational poverty to continue is through the facet of building relationships. Sperry (2015) asserted the first year of college is a critical period of transition. According to Payne (2003), when a child of poverty attends college or begins to break the cycle of poverty in their family, a single relationship with a faculty member, administrator, staff member, or fellow college student can be used in guiding, coaching, or teaching the child how to properly function in a society with hidden rules. For change to happen it is important students see their learning as tangible to their reality, even if it is not their immediate reality (Caspar, 2015). For instance, if a student of poverty wants to attend a college or university and no one in the student's immediate life has experienced college, it is imperative for the teachers to connect their learning to today's reality to prepare the student for the future (Kezar & Eckel, 2010). This connection may help inspire change within the student for the future of their education (Berry & Bass, 2012).

Payne (2003) stated students of poverty need direct teaching. Payne said to effectively teach students of poverty the hidden rules of society, it is important that relationships of trust, compassion, and willingness are formulated. Payne also asserted, with more exposure to the

realities of being economically stable, students of poverty are just as capable of being successful in higher education as their affluent classmates during high school and college. Children do not know they are poor if they have never experienced wealth; this coincides with theories of Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1962). Payne's belief resonates with Piaget's philosophy because it implies children only know what they see and learn from their own environment first-hand. Payne's theory connects to Vygotsky's theory, due to the notion that a child's social environment correlates to the outcome of their growth. Many young people who grow up in poverty never have access or opportunity to be influenced or witness financial wealth. Therefore, some students of poverty do not have the opportunity for that side of the social spectrum to influence their lives, nevertheless their opportunity to pursue higher education.

Payne (2003) declared poverty occurs in all cultural backgrounds, and because societal norms are both hidden and not directly taught in primary and secondary schools across the U.S., it is the job of teachers to teach students of this unspoken and economic divide. Payne disclosed to teach students about the economic-divide between the middle class and poverty, educators must first understand who their students are and where they come from. Payne believed that if educators at all levels of education do not understand where their students come from they cannot successfully teach and connect with them.

Payne's (2003) work referred to the hidden rules of society as the understanding that an individual comes to when learning to understand the spectrum of social classes within the economy of the United States. She expressed it is important for all individuals, including teachers and students to accept and acknowledge their own class to begin understanding the social class and societal norms of others. An example, according to Payne, is a student who lives

in poverty that sees food valued for quantity, whereas a middle-class student values the quality of food, while a wealthy student values food for its presentation.

Like Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1962), Payne (2003), asserted children learn complex information and develop vital skills through the process of development and maturation. Payne, Piaget, and Vygotsky's theories of child development recognize the relevance heredity and maturation play in the role of natural cognitive development and how this takes place during different stages for children. Payne, Piaget, and Vygotsky shared the common belief that a child's ability to cognitively develop happens in sequential order. All three theorists also believed distinct development occurs during specified stages of a child's development throughout the process of cognitive development.

### **Review of Literature**

Machi and McEvoy (2016) stated a literature review is necessary to frame and scope researched literature. Machi and McEvoy believed, a literature review clarifies and defines a research topic to canvas and document researched archives. A literature review also presents an instance established with an inclusive understanding of the researched topic.

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study is to explore how marginalized students' ability to succeed is impacted during freshman and sophomore years of college. Although the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. is the on the rise, the number of marginalized students graduating from college has not increased. As the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges continues to climb, colleges across the U.S. will have to find ways to educate, empower, and encourage marginalized students how to connect with campus life and utilize available resources. Kezar and Eckel (2010) revealed empowering marginalized students to earn a university degree will not happen until a

plan from administration and staff is put forward to assure marginalized students are aware of their opportunity to be successful in higher education. Williams (2014) stated extra support in the form of mentorship, tutoring, and community outreach is needed to sustain, engage, and empower students of color and students of poverty at a 4-year college in the United States. Castleman and Terry (2016) believed to build a solid community of student learners in higher education, all stakeholders need to support marginalized students.

The problem is marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them or they do not know how to ask for help. The review of literature for this basic qualitative research study will examine why marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them, along with why marginalized students do not ask for help. This section includes subtopics such as, support, connectivity, change and continuation, and fostering support. Each of the subtopics connects to issues marginalized students enrolled at 4-year colleges have experienced such as, lack of mentorship, not feeling connected to campus life, educational sustainability, and utilizing support provided from their college.

### **Campus Support**

According to Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012), some of the support needed for marginalized students, such as students of color and students of poverty, should come from the way facilities at 4-year colleges are managed and set-up. Though many high school campuses throughout the U.S. mirror that of 4-year college campuses, college campuses are bigger, and usually have a greater number of students, along with more freedom than a high school campus may allow for students. Therefore, there is a difference in transitioning from a high school campus to a college campus.

While many college campuses throughout the U.S. try to help empower every student to become connected to their educational family, colleges must do a better job helping students that are marginalized culturally and economically to be at ease (Doan, 2011); the way buildings such as lecture halls, dormitories, and faculty member offices are set-up and maintained is a start. For many marginalized students their experiences of higher education facilities form their first impression which affords them an opportunity where they have daily access to internet, food, and shelter without worry (Schmuck, et al., 2012). As more and more 4-year college facilities are restructured, those structures invite additional self-luxuries such as singular dormitory rooms, free wireless access, and online tutoring. This in turn could then promote more isolation and self-indulgence. Students of color and students of poverty will rarely have to interact with their peers, due to the notion that new technology and infrastructures invites seclusion. This could then induce a sense of separation for students of color and students of poverty, when all signs point to the need for marginalized students to feel connected to their peers, rather than isolated (Sanders & Burton, 1996).

Doan (2011), along with Bhat and Gagolione (2002) said the influx of marginalized students joining the college ranks, which includes students of color, first- generation students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds is on the rise. Yet, about 90% of marginalized students do not make it past their first year in college (Stephen et al., 2014). One way of eliminating the issue of sustainability in college for marginalized students is for college stakeholders such as administration, faculty, and staff to purposefully serve students of color and students of poverty through different forms of leadership. According to Hunter (1998), servant leaders realize that they could influence people to work happily towards achieving goals identified for the common good of mankind. Servant leadership offers all people the opportunity

to serve their community through intentional actions (Hunter, 1998). In the case of institutional leadership for college students, marginalized students need to see the example of Servant-leadership amongst college administration, faculty, and staff members in higher education. The precedent of servant-leadership set by administrators, faculty, and staff at 4-year colleges in the U.S. will leave a lasting impact on marginalized students, which in turn can influence the success of the students during their first and second years in college.

### **Fostering Support**

According to Williams (2014), implementing a mentorship program for marginalized students in high school, as well as in college will foster support for students' need for social connection, plus educational and social advising. Marx (2006) and Maramba and Velasquez (2012) articulated that any marginalized students who enters college starts off with a disadvantage during their freshman year, because often no one in their immediate family attended a 4-year college or has had access to higher education (Falcon, 2015).

Marginalized students such as first-generation students and students of color tend to have lower grade point averages in comparison to their college students whose parents attended college (Falcon, 2015). Only 24% of first-generation and students of color achieve a bachelor's degree or higher (Falcon). Cox and Lemon (2016) alluded that if a university wants to help this group of students sustain their educational career, along with academic and personal experiences in higher education; it is crucial for all working parts of a university to work together and create, improve, and assess a plan to measure students' gains and successes during their first-year in college. Perhaps if 4-year colleges worked with high schools and built transitional programs prior to high school graduation marginalized students would have a clearer understanding of utilizing their resources when arriving on campus at a 4-year private or public college in the U.S.

## **The Struggle Invites a Life Coach**

McGill et al. (2018) believed institutional neglect is a primary reason why marginalized students struggle in college. McGill et al. stated institutional neglect is the lack of recognition of marginalized students within higher education. According to McGill et al. the burden of work that needs to be done on colleges campuses throughout the U.S. regarding economic and race relations is the reason many colleges have fully subscribed to creating systematic change, rather than simply diagnosing the issue. Another struggle for marginalized students within higher education according to McGill et al. is the prevalence of color-blindness. McGill et al. defined color-blindness as asserting the unreality of the role race plays biologically in the lives of minorities. Regardless of effort, race and socioeconomical class play a role in the lives of marginalized students. Issues such as color-blindness lead to the reluctance of acknowledgement, consideration, and discussion of institutional shortcomings within higher education surrounding the topics of retention and the success of marginalized college students.

Marginalized students should be acknowledged, appreciated, and empowered to maintain and seek out their identity during their experience in higher education. McGill et al. (2018) stated it is the duty of colleges throughout the U.S. to create an educational environment that is nurturing for all students, especially marginalized students. Positive interactions within campus life can lead to a sense of belonging for marginalized college students. According to McGill et al. another way marginalized students feel connected to their college experience is by having a relationship with a representative from their college that could take on the role of a life coach. McGill et al. defined a life coach as a trained individual that develops a trusting relationship with a marginalized student, and helps that student explore their purpose, talents, and values, while overcoming barriers and reaching their goals. Building a relationship with a life coach during



their college experience can empower marginalized students to feel accepted, forge a sense of belonging, and connection to campus life (McGill, et al., 2018).

### **The Presence of Faculty of Color**

Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, and Vick (2017) stated increasing the number of faculty members of color on college campuses throughout the U.S would reduce the number of marginalized students that are not successful during their first 2 years of college. Benitez et al. believed when marginalized students do not see a fair representation of faculty members on campus that look like them, it leads to diminished hope and a lack of belonging, which effects marginalized students' will to be successful. When marginalized students do not have the opportunity to have discourse with faculty members that look like them it can lead to self-doubt. The presence of a diverse faculty on college campuses can mitigate a marginalized student's need to be a spokesperson for their racial or socioeconomical background. According to Benitez et al., the existence of a faculty member of color in the classroom can counter contrary stereotypes of marginalized students' racial or socioeconomical background, which promotes inclusiveness.

Benitez, et al. (2017) surmised if a college promotes the success of marginalized students, the college needs to also instill a structure that promotes the retention of a diverse faculty. Like marginalized students, faculty of color often experience feelings of isolation and a lack of mentorship. Benitez, et al. believed retaining faculty members of color will require mentorship, along with providing resources for empowering them to cope with the challenges, while also implementing dynamic and structural changes. Helping faculty members of color learn how to navigate and understand the dynamics of the college they teach at is like making freshman and

sophomores in college aware of the resources available to them on campus (Benitez, et. al, 2017).

### **Connectivity**

Caspar (2015), Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe (2016), Sanders and Burton (1996), along with Mitchell, Wood, and Witherspoon (2010) found that students of color, as well as students of poverty have been historically underrepresented in higher education since the inception of colleges and universities in the U.S. Gummadam et al., along with Sanders and Burton, claimed in order for students to be connected, universities must go above and beyond to find support systems to bridge the gap during marginalized students' experiences throughout their enrollment in higher education. This includes the need to feel at home and safe in facilities such as dormitories, lecture halls, recreational spaces, and dining halls.

Doan (2011), Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012), Williams (2014), and Clark (2011) alluded to the way facilities are designed should be taken into consideration amongst college and university personnel because the way college spaces are physically set-up could lead to students either being *successful or unsuccessful*, depending on the marginalized students' prior experience living with others, having their own room, sharing a room, a common eating area, and access to educational confinement. Schmuck et al. concluded that students must first become comfortable in a new environment, before even considering the opportunity to grow academically.

According to Doan, since the 1960s marginalized students have attempted to access and succeed in higher education. Doan added as more students of color and students of poverty begin to enroll in institutions of higher education, the more significant the issue of retaining those students will become. Like Doan, Williams said students need to establish connectivity with their new environment to be successful during their first and second years of college.

Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) said facilities should be designed where students can interact with one another beyond the classroom, through opportunities such as student spaces. Clark (2011), Doan (2011), and Williams (2014) explained classes which champion intentional peer-to-peer interaction should happen on a frequent basis at 4-year college campuses in the U.S. While some institutions of higher education may not see one of its primary jobs as providing spaces for social settings, like Doan, Williams, Clark, and Schmuck et al., authors Murphy and Zirkel (2015) claimed it is an important way of successfully empowering marginalized students attending a 4-year college in the U.S. Avenues such as networking are breaking the emotional and physical bridge that residential life provided for students. Schmuck et al. pointed out if colleges want to better serve students of marginalized backgrounds, the construction and management of facilities need to be taken into consideration, especially for students of color and students of poverty that live on campus. These considerations should further promote social interactions and activities for all first-year college students for students to feel accepted and safe in their new environment (Sperry, 2015).

### **Microaggressions Towards Marginalized Students**

According to Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2015) a microaggression is a brief common behavioral, environmental, or verbal indignity towards a targeted group. Sarcedo et al. stated microaggressions can create a derogatory or hostile environment whether the microaggression is intentional or unintentional. On college campuses throughout the U.S. both first-generation and marginalized students face microaggressions from their classmates, along with some administrators, faculty, and staff members. Sarcedo et al. believed at many colleges within the U.S. marginalized students are forced to change their behavior, culture, language and thoughts to be successful in college. Forcing marginalized students to change how they think,

along with their behavior, culture, and language is asking them to assimilate to the institution of higher education, while losing a sense of their own identity (Sarcedo, et al., 2015). Assimilation within higher education promotes deficit thinking, which negatively impacts the college experience for marginalized students.

Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2017) surmised microaggressions have three different effects on marginalized college students. The first effect of microaggressions towards marginalized college students according to Sarcedo et al. is marginalized students feel emotionally threatened because of their race or social class. The second effect of microaggressions towards marginalized students according to Sarcedo et al. is marginalized students feel an emotional toll because, they cannot visualize themselves being successful since they see few students or staff members that look like them on campus. The third effect of microaggressions towards marginalized students according to Sarcedo is marginalized students feel they are not supposed to be in college. Sarcedo et al. stated the effects of microaggressions lead to marginalized college students feeling targeted by their classmates, faculty, and staff members. The consequence of feeling targeted leaves marginalized students to feel less welcomed and supported on their colleges' campus.

According to Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2017) one way to prepare marginalized students for college is to raise an awareness of Whiteness within the institution of higher education. Sarcedo et al. defined Whiteness as the majority of people that have traditionally had access to higher education, and that majority being Caucasian students, faculty, and staff members. Whiteness can be expressed within higher education through microaggressions. It is the job of colleges throughout the U.S. to educate Caucasian students, faculty, and staff members how their intentional or unintentional actions and beliefs can be

deemed a microaggression towards marginalized students (Sarcedo, et al., 2017). Creating awareness campaigns about microaggressions whether intended or unintended for institutional programs within higher education would be a start. Sarcedo believed developing faculty and staff trainings, orientation for new students, and community service learning projects are a starting point for to rid college campuses throughout the U.S. of microaggressions towards marginalized students.

### **Climate and Retention**

According to McClain and Perry (2017) racial climate contributes to the retention of marginalized students whether they are students of color, students of poverty or both. McClain and Perry stated college campuses within the U.S. have five components that effect the retention of marginalized students: Institutional historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, Compositional diversity, Psychological climate, Behavioral climate, and Structural Diversity. McClain and Perry believed that a college's Institutional historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion could be beneficial or detrimental to retaining a marginalized student.

Most 4-year colleges within the U.S. have a history of being exclusive, rather than inclusive (McClain & Perry, 2017). When desegregation occurred in the 1960s in higher education throughout the U.S., it originally caused discomfort on many college campuses amongst both students of color and Caucasian students. Yet, throughout time as racial lines began to blur amongst students of color and Caucasian students, lines of retention of marginalized students such as students of color continues to decrease in comparison to their Caucasian classmates (Williams, 2014).

McClain and Perry (2017) defined Compositional diversity as the number of students, faculty, and staff members of color on a college campus. According to McClain and Perry full-

time faculty members of color make-up 12% of professors at 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. McClain and Perry believed the lack of professors of color on college campuses makes it harder for marginalized students to find mentors that can relate to their plight, because many marginalized students believe their Caucasian professors are not empathetic to their experiences as a student. McClain and Perry defined Psychological climate as an individual's opinion on cross-cultural relationships within a college. According to McClain and Perry, 90% of college presidents within the U.S. believed their institution's race relations were in good standing, whereas many students, faculty, and staff members of color on college campuses disagree (Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, & Vick, 2017).

McClain and Perry (2017) stated Behavioral climate constitutes intercommunication and the quality of relationships amongst various ethnic and racial groups on a college campus. At many 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. marginalized students of color are aware of the divide amongst themselves and their Caucasian classmates. McClain and Perry surmised segregation is self-imposed by both groups, but students of color are less likely to try to unite with Caucasian students for fear of rejection. According to McClain and Perry Structural diversity is the way a college represents administrative and operational aspects. Diversifying how the budget is used, creating inclusive curriculum, and hiring faculty and staff of color are practices that improve the academic experience and retention of marginalized students at 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. (McClain & Perry, 2017).

### **Change and Continuation**

Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) and Walker and Syed (2013) demonstrated the notion that the community's input is needed. Yet the issue of empowering students of color and students of poverty to succeed in higher education must first be resolved at the college level. To truly

change colleges for the better, it is imperative that all levels of leadership amongst the college not only acknowledges the issues, but more importantly strive for change. According to Zinshteyn (2016) the number of marginalized students of color and poverty enrolled in colleges throughout the U.S. is on the rise, many of those students are first-generation college students: 25% of Asian American students, 41% of African American students, and 61% if Hispanic students. Zinshteyn also said more than 90% of marginalized students enrolled in a private or public in 4-year colleges in the U.S. will not earn their bachelor's degree within 6 years.

Fullan and Scott (2009) said the challenge in eliminating critical hurdles such as the continuation of marginalized students enrolled at a private or public 4-year college is not only acknowledging the quandary, but also doing something about it. One way of addressing the issue of sustainability amongst marginalized college students is to see the setback as an immediate issue.

Marx (2006) noted that an issue brief which is a short summary of an issue should be available to all university personnel to empower university leaders to readily address key issues. According to Schmuck et al. (2012) using a tool such as an issue brief allows for all invested parties such as administrators, faculty, alumni, and community members to acknowledge and address the situation immediately. In the case of the continuation of marginalized students, creating an issue brief helps unite staff, administration, and other invested parties to identify stumbling blocks to thoroughly sort and solve the complication at hand. To further empower marginalized students, the issue brief could be sent to the entire 4-year college working community such as administration, faculty, and staff members.

There are students of every culture, ethnicity, faith, gender, and sexual-orientation, that pursue college degrees (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014); students that are born into

poverty or some other form of marginalization are the ones that struggle to sustain their college career (Smith, 2007). According to Cilesiz and Drotos (2016), many of these marginalized students lack a parent or family member that attended college. According to Falcon (2015), 63% of Caucasian students enrolling in college are nine times greater than African-American, and Latino, and Asian Students to finish their bachelor's degree within 6 years. Cilesiz and Drotos also described the economic risk associated with paying for college is a deterrent for many students of poverty that want to attend a private or public 4-year college. Cilesiz and Drotos shared the example of a student whose family earned \$12,100 annually. If the student's financial aid covered all of the student's estimated yearly fees at a 4-year college, except for \$3,600, the student could not afford to attend college (Cilesiz & Drotos, 2016). Schmuck et al. (2012) held that getting stakeholders such as faculty, administrators, and staff members involved in the educational career of marginalized students through avenues such as mentorship, empathy, and cultural sensitivity will forge a connection with marginalized students. The sense of connection will further empower students of color and students of poverty to feel fused to their campus' community, which in turn promotes academic and social success.

Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012), Hollifield-Hoyle and Hammons (2015), and Murphy and Zirkel (2015) postulated that a conscious effort is needed to empower marginalized students to sustain a successful career in college. It is important that stakeholders such as university administration, faculty, staff, and alumni, along with outlying community partners connected to universities take on an active role in ensuring the students' success. Stakeholders and departments such as the Board of Trustees, the President and Dean of the university, faculty and staff members, the Office of Admissions, the Financial Aid Office, the Office of Equity and/or Diversity, the Office of Student Life, along with alumni and community members will all play a



large role in the success of the continuation of marginalized students in higher education (Framer-Hinton, 2008). The stakeholders must acknowledge the struggles of marginalized students in college and work on making sure marginalized college students know how to access their resources, and a mentor is provided for marginalized students.

Schmuck et al. (2012) and Hurtado (2006) trusted that to build a solid community of student learners in any facet of education, all involved parties should make a conscious effort to support students that are marginalized ethnically and economically. Schmuck et al. included that for a university to help this group of students continue their educational career it is crucial for all stakeholders to get involved from the onset of a student's college experience. Stakeholders such as alumni, community leaders, and community members could find a way to serve marginalized students through some level of the university or within the community (Schmuck et al., 2012). There are many ways to get involved in this initiative such as: volunteering to be a mentor, organizing a student-to-student mentor program, forming a vision council in conjunction with faculty, staff, and students, or empowering students with internships within the community in their field of interest. Williams (2014) shared, if all stakeholders work collaboratively it will help ensure marginalized students can become emerging leaders within the university community.

## **Success**

Smith, et al. (2017) believed institutions within higher education in the U.S. are infiltrated with contradictory information. Marginalized groups such as first-generation students, students of color, and students of poverty are blitzed with negative impressions and expectations from the onset of their college experience, which can facilitate failure according to Smith, et al. Despite history, marginalized students such as first-generation students, students of color, and

students of poverty are capable of successfully adjusting to college. Smith et al. stated successful acclimation to college takes more than mastering skills which are essential for coursework.

Although freshman and sophomores in college are often distanced from their usual sources of academic, emotional, and social support, students do have access to new resources of support. Integrating marginalized students into academic environments beyond the classroom that allow for connection with instructors and mentors can assist marginalized students in building confidence academically, emotionally, and socially. Smith et al. (2017) surmised another way for colleges in the U.S. to determine how to help marginalized students be successful during their freshman and sophomore years in college is to examine what factors are vital to the successes of marginalized students, versus what factors cause marginalized students to struggle during their first 2 years of college. According to Smith, et al. social support enhances overall well-being for marginalized college students. Social support includes associations and resources that provide marginalized students with aid, advice, approval, comfort, and consistency. When marginalized students build a social network on campus, they feel connected and valued. The values that are built from feeling connected to campus life leads marginalized students to share their experiences, take academic risks, and presume ownership in their learning.

Smith et al. (2017) stated perceived support contributes to intrinsic and self-determined motivation and success amongst marginalized college students. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are factors which Smith, et al. believed impact academic motivation and success in marginalized college students during their fresh and sophomore years in college. Autonomy provides marginalized students the opportunity to make choices based upon their own

experiences, regardless of consequence throughout their college experience. Competence allows marginalized students to develop new skills and techniques in order to overcome obstacles. While relatedness empowers marginalized students to feel connected and respected by other individuals. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness assert intrinsic motivation, which can lead to academic success for marginalized students during their freshman and sophomore years in college (Smith, et al. , 2017).

Marginalized students such as first-generation students, students of color, and students of poverty can be successful in their transition from high school to college. Academic, social, and emotional support enhance the level of adjustment, comfortability, and security in marginalized students (Smith, et al., 2017). When marginalized feel connected and supported it leads to better emotional and social outcomes, which in turn, leads to enhanced levels of academic success during their first freshman sophomore years of college.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

According to Noble and Smith (2015) qualitative research lacks scientific rigor, includes poor justification of adopted methods, and lacks transparency in the findings, because the findings are based on opinion. Qualitative research also presents the issue of credibility. The findings in qualitative research are judged by both the participants and the researcher, which could lead to biases. Noble and Smith stated qualitative research is challenging because there is no consensus standard which is set to how the research should be analyzed, critiqued, or judged.

In qualitative research the researcher must consistently check the data for the inclusion of any biases. Noble and Smith (2015) believed in order for qualitative research to be valid the researcher should create generalizability, reliability, and validity throughout the study. In qualitative research the researcher must also acknowledge multiple realities could exist, while

personal biases may result in issues within the methodological results. Applicability, confirmability, and consistency are criteria which should be used throughout the process of evaluation in qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

In order for qualitative research to be accurate and creditable the results of the study should be detailed. Agee (2009) believed the creation of quality research questions generates the creditability, reliability, and transparency of a qualitative study. Noble and Smith (2015) stated using a reflective journal, employing clear and transparent descriptions of the process, and analysis of emerging themes as strategies for enhancing the credibility of qualitative research.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Williams stated (2014) implementing a mentorship program for marginalized students in high school, as well as in college will foster support for students' need for social connection, plus educational and social advising. McGill et al. (2018) believed institutional neglect is a primary reason why marginalized students struggle in college. The application of guidance and mentorship opportunities during the transition from high school senior to a freshman in college would help marginalized students better comprehend the resources which are available to them from the onset of their college experience. When using resources that are readily available to them such as the career center, the tutoring center, and the writing center marginalized students should feel valued and welcomed by their institution.

Caspar (2015), Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe (2016), Sanders and Burton (1996), along with Mitchell, Wood, and Witherspoon (2010) found that students of color, as well as students of poverty have been historically underrepresented in higher education since the inception of colleges and universities in the U.S. As the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges continues to steadily increase throughout the U.S., it is vital that the stakeholders at all

colleges acknowledge and implement extra support programs for students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students. Support systems could include readily available opportunities to participate in cultural clubs, recreational activities, and mentorship from marginalized alumni of the college. Positive interactions with administration, alumni, faculty, and staff within campus life could lead to a sense of belonging for marginalized students, which might lead to the pursuit of a college degree beyond their freshman and sophomore years in college.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

McGill et al. (2018) believed institutional neglect is a primary reason why marginalized students struggle in college. Although McGill et al. stated institutional neglect is an issue for marginalized students, the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges within the U.S. grew 40% from 1976 to 2014 according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016). While institutional neglect is one reason marginalized students struggle during their first 2 years of college, many colleges in the U.S. are working on correcting the issue.

According to Quaye and Harper (2015) many colleges in the U.S. are using student engagement as a critical way to alleviate institutional neglect. Many 4-year colleges within the U.S. are making an effort to help marginalized students understand how to use their time purposefully to balance their educational lives with personal activities. Quaye and Harper stated 4-year colleges are deploying their resources to institute curriculum, learning opportunities, and support services to empower marginalized students to sustain their education and graduate from college. Marginalized students who are involved in educational activities both inside and outside of the classroom are more likely to persist to engage in their experiences and graduate (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Although institutional neglect of marginalized students may be an issue at some

4-year colleges within the U.S., many colleges are working toward helping marginalized students work towards earning their degree through the implementation of relatable curriculum, allowing learning opportunities, and adding extra support services to empower marginalized students to succeed beyond their freshman and sophomore years in college.

### **Summary**

Retaining college students beyond their freshman year is a struggle at many private and public 4-year colleges in the U.S. Many marginalized students have limited experience in the realm of college. Most of their parents and grandparents did not attend college, therefore marginalized students experience within the environment of college are limited or nonexistent. Cassleman (2014) said in comparison to Caucasian college students who have graduated at a rate of 62.1% within 6 years of enrolling in a 4-year college in the U.S.; African American college students' graduation rate within 6 years of enrolling in a 4-year college in the U.S. was 39.9%.

Though many high school campuses throughout the U.S. mirror that of 4-year college campuses, college campuses are bigger, and usually have a greater number of students, along with more freedom than a high school campus may allow for students. To truly change colleges for the better, it is imperative that all levels of leadership amongst the college not only acknowledges the issues, but more importantly strive for change. Opportunities such as connectivity with university faculty and administrators, alumni, and community partners, while also bridging a connection with programs in high school will help continue the success of marginalized students in higher education. Through a conscious effort, the implementation of peer-to-peer tutoring courses such as English, History, Math, Philosophy, Psychology, and professional mentorship for empower marginalized students during the first 2 years of college. While the makeup of functionally communal spaces including group study rooms, social areas,

recreational centers, and cafeterias, marginalized students such as students of color and students of poverty will create more opportunities to succeed for these students to succeed. As more and more colleges throughout the United States strive to continue success amongst marginalized students of color and poverty; students of color and students of poverty will become less marginalized and more successful.

Researchers Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) surmised there are different ways to evaluate the success of changes that are needed to ensure the success of marginalized students during their first 2 years of college. These measures may include a survey for current students from marginalized backgrounds, surveys for alumni of marginalized backgrounds, and surveys for invested stakeholders to ensure success of marginalized students academically, as well as students' social well-being. According to Williams (2014), implementing a mentorship program for marginalized students in high school, as well as in college will foster support for students' need for social connection, plus educational and social advising. Marx (2006) and Maramba and Velasquez (2012) articulated that any marginalized students who enters college starts off with a disadvantage during their freshman year, because often no one in their immediate family attended a 4-year college or has had access to higher education (Falcon, 2015).

McGill et al. (2018) believed institutional neglect is a primary reason why marginalized students struggle in college. McGill et al. stated institutional neglect is the lack of recognition of marginalized students within higher education.

Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, and Vick (2017) stated increasing the number of faculty members of color on college campuses throughout the U.S would reduce the number of marginalized students that are not successful during their first 2 years of college. Benitez et al. believed when marginalized students do not see a fair representation of faculty members on

campus that look like them, it leads to diminished hope and a lack of belonging, which effects marginalized students' will to be successful.

Caspar (2015), Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe (2016), Sanders and Burton (1996), along with Mitchell, Wood, and Witherspoon (2010) found that students of color, as well as students of poverty have been historically underrepresented in higher education since the inception of colleges and universities in the U.S.; Gummadam et al., along with Sanders and Burton, claimed in order for students to be connected, universities must go above and beyond to find support systems to bridge the gap during marginalized students' experiences throughout their enrollment in higher education. This includes the need to feel at home and safe in facilities such as dormitories, lecture halls, recreational spaces, and dining halls.

According to Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2015) a microaggression is a brief common behavioral, environmental, or verbal indignity towards a targeted group. Sarcedo et al. stated microaggressions can create a derogatory or hostile environment whether the microaggression is intentional or unintentional. On college campuses throughout the U.S. both first-generation and marginalized students face microaggressions from their classmates, along with some administrators, faculty, and staff members. McClain and Perry (2017) stated college campuses within the U.S. have five components that effect the retention of marginalized students: Institutional historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, Compositional diversity, Psychological climate, Behavioral climate, and Structural Diversity. McClain and Perry believed that a college's Institutional historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion could be beneficial or detrimental to retaining a marginalized student.

Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) and Walker and Syed (2013) demonstrated the notion that the community's input is needed. Yet the issue of empowering students of color and students



of poverty to succeed in higher education must first be resolved at the college level. To truly change colleges for the better, it is imperative that all levels of leadership amongst the college not only acknowledges the issues, but more importantly strive for change. Noble and Smith (2015) believed in order for qualitative research to be valid the researcher should create generalizability, reliability, and validity throughout the study. In qualitative research the researcher must also acknowledge multiple realities could exist, while personal biases may result in issues within the methodological results. Positive interactions with administration, alumni, faculty, and staff within campus life could lead to a sense of belonging for marginalized students. Educational activities both inside and outside of the classroom invite marginalized students to persist to engage in their experiences and graduate (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

Smith et al. (2017) stated successful acclimation to college takes more than mastering skills which are essential for coursework. Although freshman and sophomores in college are often distanced from their usual sources of academic, emotional, and social support, students do have access to new resources of support. Integrating marginalized students into academic environments beyond the classroom that allow for connection with instructors and mentors can assist marginalized students in building confidence academically, emotionally, and socially. Within Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology, research questions, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, research population and sampling method, procedures for recruitment and participation, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness, and expected findings of this basic qualitative research study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

According to Creswell (2013), individuals seek understanding through their own experiences. The goal of research allows for participants' sentiments towards the condition of a study to be analyzed (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research can explore the depth of an individual or a group of people bounded by time. Creswell believed the researcher should use an uninterrupted period of time to collect and analyze data. Merriam (2009) believed a basic qualitative study is trustworthy research method. Merriam stated a basic qualitative research study was derived from theoretically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction. A basic qualitative research study can expose effective practices, strategies, and techniques of administrators and teachers in the field of education (Merriam, 2009). During a basic qualitative research study a researcher can inquire about the experiences of participants through interviews or surveys, along with what the participants' experiences mean to them. According to Merriam attitudes, beliefs, ideas, and opinions of the participants may emerge as part of the findings of a basic qualitative research study, but they should not be the sole focus of the study.

Shenton (2004) declared, when the researcher takes a stance in the process of selecting participants for qualitative research, it builds a direct bridge to the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis of the study. Once the foundation of a basic qualitative study is established, it allows for the researcher to further analyze, scrutinize, and delve into the data collected from the participants of the study. Shenton stated when a qualitative study shows validity, it further establishes the dependability of the researcher's methodology, research design, and rationale. Like Shenton, Baxter, and Jack (2008) emphasized researchers should have a genuine interest in their qualitative study.

Sullivan and Sargeant (2011) stated qualitative research generates a hypothesis within research, while quantitative research tests a hypothesis. According to Sullivan and Sargeant qualitative research methods explore, describe, or generate theories based on social concepts and human intentions. In education, qualitative research aims to comprehend how learning happens through the examination of small groups of learners with a focus on each individual participants' experience (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). Qualitative research tries to explain an interconnection or relationship.

Qualitative research focuses on an individual case, whereas quantitative research focuses on variables (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). Qualitative research can include interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions, and surveys. Sullivan and Sargeant believed qualitative research is concerned about the experience of the individual participant within a study, while quantitative research focuses on calculating the mean of each individual participants' responses. There are various ways for researchers to collect information when implementing a qualitative research method such as a basic qualitative research study. Research practices such as collecting field notes, implementation of focus groups, interviews, reflective journals, and generating surveys are examples of tools that are used in qualitative research (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). After data is collected using tools such as field notes, focus groups, interviews, reflective journals, or surveys, researchers review observations from the results of the tools which are used for the qualitative research method. Analysis of the collected data occurs after the impressions of the data's results are organized in a structured format by the researcher (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011).

Sullivan and Sargeant stated qualitative researchers generally try to study participants in their natural settings, which can lead to ethical issues. The use of informed consent can alleviate the sensitive nature of discussions and ensure creditability of the study. Because qualitative

research can lead to the exposure of sensitive experiences, opinions, and personal information, the protection of participants is vital at the onset of the study (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011).

Creswell (2013) and Sullivan and Sargeant (2011) believed qualitative researchers must exhibit that their findings are creditable. Like quantitative research, a creditable qualitative research study with the review of basic existing knowledge. Unlike, quantitative research, qualitative research does not look to find one single truth, but rather multiple views of a specified reality (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). Dependability within qualitative research is achieved through the consistency of data. When the data within qualitative research is consistent it leads to transparency and trustworthiness. The overall goal in establishing dependability of the data in qualitative research should minimize personal bias, which ensures the researchers interpretation of the data collected for a study.

Brown, Gielen, Gibbons, and Kuriansky (2017) stated the number of marginalized students enrolled in private and public 4-year colleges has gradually grown throughout time. Yet, the number of marginalized students who graduated from private and public colleges has not increased. Despite the increase in the number marginalized students attending 4-year colleges in the U.S., 90% of marginalized students are not academically successful during the first-term they are enrolled as college students (Zinshteyn, 2016). The dropout rate for marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges in the U.S. continues to rise; according to Camera (2015) Caucasian college students graduated at a rate of 64%, compared to a 50% graduation rate for marginalized students. The problem is marginalized students do not utilize the assistance offered to them or they do not know how to ask for help. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during freshman and sophomore years in college.

Chapter 3 will include the six guiding research questions for this basic qualitative research study, the logic behind the selected research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and reasoning to why the population will be researched. This chapter will also contain the procedures that were used for recruitment of the participants for this study, along with why a confidential Qualtrics survey will be used for the instrumentation of this basic qualitative research study. Chapter 3 concludes with an insight into how the data will be collected and explored, plus an examination about the issues of trustworthiness and the expected findings of this basic qualitative research study.

The following are research questions within this dissertation to help the reader understand the purpose of this basic qualitative research study:

### **Research Questions**

1. What impacts marginalized students' ability to be successful during freshman and sophomore years in college?
2. How do high school experiences impact marginalized students' freshman and sophomore years in college?
3. What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?
4. What challenges impacted marginalized freshmen and sophomore student success in college?
5. How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems and resources during their freshman and sophomore years in college?
6. What support systems and resources are available for marginalized freshman and sophomore students on college campuses?

## **Research Design and Rationale**

According to Fullan (2011) many students of marginalized backgrounds struggle academically and socially in college during their freshman and sophomore years. I used a qualitative research approach for my design since qualitative research allows for participants to understand their reality through subjective meanings and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a qualitative study ensures that an issue has research questions which will guide the study; a basic qualitative research study was the most logical form of research for my research topic because I targeted a very specific group of participants. A basic qualitative research study also allows for the participants to share their own first-hand experiences as marginalized students during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

## **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the qualitative researcher was to create a confidential Qualtrics survey, recruit participants to respond to the survey, analyze participants responses to the survey, and interpret the data in conjunction with perspectives researched in the literature. In taking a basic qualitative research study approach to this study I did not bracket my own assumptions in the data analysis; instead, I acknowledged my assumptions and reflected upon them in a reflective journal throughout the study. I did not reveal my assumptions to the participants during the study.

The first 2 years of my undergraduate experience were plagued by frustration and a lack of awareness. I did not understand what resources were available to me as a college student. It was not until I found myself on academic probation during my sophomore year of college that I realized I needed help. After talking with different acquaintances who were also marginalized students, I found two resources which I would come to rely upon for the remainder of my

undergraduate experience, The Office of Student Life and the Ethnic Student Center. Both the Office of Student Life and Ethnic Student Center empowered me to know the allies I had on campus such as the library, the tutoring center, and the writing center.

In order to prevent my current students from making some of the same missteps I did during my first 2 years of college, I have set out to educate and empower them to be successful during their high school experience by making sure they are aware of the opportunities and resources available in the building. My hope is that the students who decide to enroll in college following high school will continue to seek out assistance once they arrive on a college campus. Because I work closely with the college preparatory programs at the high school which I teach, the data collected and analyzed for this basic qualitative research study helped me share what we can do as a school community to prepare students transitioning from a high school senior to a freshman in college.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The participants for this basic qualitative research study were selected purposefully to guarantee transparency and validity. According to Dudovskiy (2016), purposeful sampling is when researchers use their judgment to choose individuals for qualitative research. The purposeful sampling method is effective when a limited number of participants serve as primary data sources to meet the goals and objectives of the study (Creswell, 2013). The participants for this basic qualitative research study were marginalized students who graduated from the same high school in 2015 or 2016. According to Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014), marginalized students include any student with a cultural or linguistic disadvantage, deprived access, disenfranchised social-class, or underrepresented racial background. Each of the

participants selected for this basic qualitative research study self-identified as a marginalized student in accordance to Sapon-Shevin's definition of a marginalized student.

By keeping the number of participants no larger than 15 marginalized freshman and sophomore college students, it allowed me the opportunity to fully immerse into the data from participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, while also meeting the objective of exploring what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during their freshman and sophomore years in college. Dudovskiy (2016) noted the advantage of using a purposive sample during a basic qualitative research study is that it allows time and cost-effective sampling, which also allows for effectiveness in exploring anthropological situations, when the findings benefit from an intuitive approach.

Each of the prospective participants enrolled at a private or public 4-year college in the U.S during the fall semester following their high school graduation in 2015 or 2016. If less than 10 prospective participants decided to participate in this basic qualitative research study, I would have revisited the concentration of this basic qualitative research study and began to contact a group of new prospective participants. I contacted each of the former high school students who I have had zero contact with since they graduated in 2015 or 2016. I had access to the prospective participants' contact information because the school I presently teach at keeps contact information for all graduates in the career center. As a member of the scholarship committee all information is readily accessible. I have held no supervisory role of the prospective participants since their graduation from high school in 2015 or 2016.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

I emailed 15 marginalized students that graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. in 2015 or 2016. Each participant moved on to pursue



their bachelor's degree at a private or public 4-year college in the U.S. during the fall semester following their high school graduation. During the recruitment process, I gathered information about each participant's willingness to take part in this basic qualitative research study. I aimed to keep the number of purposefully selected participants for this basic qualitative research study small, in order to keep this basic qualitative research study deliberate, focused, and methodical. The inquiry process included topics such as: the educational background of the purposefully selected participants' parents, the participants' ethnicities, culture and gender, economic background as well as the participants' academic standing, involvement in extracurricular activities, and experiences as a first-generation student. Each participant for this basic qualitative research study qualified as either a student of color, student of poverty, or a first-generation student. When I sought prospective participants, I inquired about their cultural background, current economic standing, and whether they are a first-generation student.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for this basic qualitative research study was a confidential Qualtrics survey. The Qualtrics survey consisted of the six primary research questions, along with six questions that correlated to the six primary research questions. Each of the participants were asked the exact same questions by way of confidential survey using Qualtrics. Using a confidential survey through Qualtrics allowed participants to answer questions without bias or pressure to respond in a specified manner. Using a confidential survey allowed participants to respond to the questions without feeling obliged to respond to the questions in a fashion which could happen if participants were interviewed in-person. The Qualtrics survey responses allowed me to gain further insight into the participants' experiences during their freshman and sophomore years as marginalized college students at different private or public 4-year colleges

throughout the U.S. The confidential Qualtrics survey was used to conduct this basic qualitative research study to explore what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during their freshman and sophomore years in college at different private or public 4-year colleges. The Qualtrics survey was sent to participants through email from the Qualtrics website.

### **Data Collection**

All participants were contacted through email to confirm their email addresses were correct before the confidential Qualtrics survey was sent to prospective participants from the Qualtrics website. The time frame to complete the confidential Qualtrics survey was 3 weeks, which allowed participants ample time to respond to the survey. The confidential Qualtrics survey included 13 questions about the participants' experiences as a marginalized student during their freshman and sophomore years at a 4-year college in the U.S. The results of the data for this basic qualitative research study came directly from the participants' responses to the Qualtrics survey.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Creswell (2013) a qualitative research method seeks to find the meaning of an experience from the participants of the study. Creswell also stated qualitative research examined the injustice of the participants being interviewed or surveyed. Creswell believed using a theoretical lens in qualitative research provides an adapting lens for studies that question the marginalization of groups including: gender, race, and class. Creswell asserted gathering detailed information from participants naturally developed broad patterns, theories, and generalizations which can be compared to participants' backgrounds and actual literature on the research topic.

The participants' responses to the Qualtrics survey was examined using open, axial, and selective coding. After I received all of the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, I analyzed the data through open, axial, and selective coding. The first step used in the process of analyzation was open coding. During the process of opening coding I read through the data multiple times and created labels for chunks of the data which summarized the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey.

The second step that was applied in the process of analyzation for this basic qualitative research study was axial coding. Axial coding was utilized to reaffirm the concepts rightfully represented the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, and to explore the relationships among the open codes. Each axial code for this basic qualitative research study was based on an open code founded from the results of the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey.

The final step I used during the process of analyzing the data was selective coding. I used selective coding to identify key concepts and variables from the participants' responses to the data from confidential Qualtrics survey. Each step in the process of coding will be discussed in further detail in the Methodology section of this dissertation, located in Chapter 4.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research allows for the collection of data to be analyzed for themes and perspectives of the participants. Open and axial coding allowed me the opportunity to analyze and interpret dissimilarities, emerging themes, saturation, similarities, and unforeseen responses to the data collected. The findings of the data from participants' responses were compared to the findings of both the theorists in the conceptual framework and the review of researched literature in Chapter 2 of this basic qualitative research study.

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

According to von Diether (2017) ethical studies are important when planning, conducting, and evaluating research. Von Diether also stated the study should present minimal risk to participants physically or psychologically. I ensured there were minimal risks for participants of this basic qualitative research study.

The use of a Qualtrics survey will assist in keeping participants' responses to the survey confidential. All of the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey will be printed out directly from the Qualtrics website, after the 3-week window participants have to complete the Qualtrics survey is over. After I complete the analysis of the participants' responses to the Qualtrics survey all documents will be shredded, then recycled.

## **Limitations**

One of the limitations in implementing a basic qualitative research study is the time-span in which the study takes place is limited in duration. Despite the short time period of this basic qualitative research study, one of the strengths of the research study is the study's focus. Although a 3-week window is brief, it allowed each of the participants ample opportunity to take their time when reflecting upon and responding to the confidential Qualtrics survey about their experiences during their freshman and sophomore years as a marginalized college student.

## **Confirmability**

Using a confidential Qualtrics survey as the instrument for this basic qualitative research study ensured participants' responses were direct and honest. According to Dudovskiy (2016) one of the advantages of using a purposive sample during a basic qualitative research study is that it allows for effectiveness in exploring anthropological situations, when the findings can benefit from an intuitive approach. Merriam (2009) stated a basic qualitative research study

should be used by researchers who are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how people construct their worlds, and what meaning people attribute to their experiences. The participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey were embedded with the six research questions. The participants' responses to the confidential survey were analyzed to understand the participants' perception of success as a marginalized college student during their freshman and sophomore years.

Utilizing a confidential Qualtrics survey for this basic qualitative research study empowered prospective participants' to be candid, direct, and honest in their responses to the open-ended questions present in the confidential survey. One of the pros of doing a confidential survey is that it allowed for participants to be insightful because their responses were not directly correlated to their name or title. Whereas a personal interview could take away from the participants' willingness to be honest and direct, because of the influence an interviewer can possess or for fear of their personal information being connected to their responses.

Yin (1981) believed researchers will react adversely whenever they are challenged with individualized data, which occurs whether the qualitative study is a basic qualitative research study or phenomenological study according to Merriam (2009). Although all of the participants in this basic qualitative research study graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S., this basic qualitative research study could be conducted at any urban school in the U.S. which promotes higher education to its students that come from a background of marginalization, yet the results would vary. The results would vary because, prospective participants would represent only themselves, their college, and their own individual experiences as a student of color, student of poverty, or first-generation student.

## **Internal Validity**

Creswell (2013) stated internal validity evaluates connections and associations between causes and effects. Research studies are commonly formed on the analysis of cause and effect (Creswell, 2013). It is important to examine the causes of marginalized students' struggles and successes in college during their freshman and sophomore years in college; Cox and Lemon (2016) stated that if a college wants to empower a group of marginalized students to sustain their educational career, along with academic and personal experiences in higher education; it is important for all working parts of a college to work cohesively and create, progress, and assess a proposal to evaluate students' gains and successes during their first-year in college. Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data from the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, I anticipated there would be some saturation within the participants' responses to the survey. Although all prospective participants in this basic qualitative research study classified themselves as a marginalized student because they are a student of color or student of poverty, not all candidates classified themselves as both. Even though participants attended different colleges within the U.S. many responses to the questions from the confidential Qualtrics survey were saturated, which further proves the validity of this basic qualitative research study.

Piaget (1959) stated that an individual's extensive experiences within one's environment are important to everyone's cognitive development. All 11 participants of this basic qualitative research study graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S., therefore some of their experiences growing up in the same community may have contributed to their experiences as students of marginalization at various colleges throughout the U.S. Like Payne (2003), Piaget implied children only know what they see and learn from within their own

environment. Although the participants from this basic qualitative research study attend different colleges within the U.S., the common factor of being a marginalized student on a college campus may have saturated the outcome to the participants' experiences during their freshman and sophomore years.

### **External Validity**

According to Merriam (1995) the more often a study is reproduced, the more reliable the study will be. Merriam also believed qualitative researchers try to understand the world through the perception of those in it. Merriam stated qualitative research is an interpretation of someone else's reality through the lens of the researcher. Merriman asserted, the more the researcher reads, hears, and observes phenomenon in interviews or surveys, the more assured the researcher can convey the outcome of the study as both, reliable and truthful. Like Merriman, Shenton (2004) surmised when the findings of a qualitative research study are implemented with detailed description and, planned and clearly executed it ensures the understanding and effectiveness of the research design.

The findings for this basic qualitative research study were detailed, planned, and executed in a clear and concise manner. Therefore, this basic qualitative research study could be repeated by an external researcher from any geographical region within U.S. The results would vary depending on the individual experiences of each prospective participant during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

Although each of the participants in this basic qualitative research study is classified as a marginalized student, if this basic qualitative research study was replicated by another researcher, the outcome would vary. Each of the participants of this basic qualitative research study stated they are a marginalized student according to Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin's

(2014) definition, a college student with a cultural or linguistic disadvantage, deprived access, disenfranchised social-class, or underrepresented racial background. The data for this basic qualitative research study directly correlated to the analysis of the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

According to Noble and Smith, A. (2015) personal biases can influence findings in qualitative research. Although all of the participants of this basic qualitative research study were once students at the school which I teach, I have had zero contact with any of the participants since they graduated in 2015 or 2016. I recognize I have a connection to the prospective participants, but that connection is fastened solely to their high school experience. Therefore, I recognize what could be implied as a bias, yet by directly using the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey to collect and analyze data, ensured the validity of the outcome for this basic qualitative research study. In order to bracket my personal responses, thoughts, and maintain a steadfast awareness to my own biases when analyzing the data, I kept a reflective journal throughout the process while conducting this basic qualitative research study. I decided to use a confidential Qualtrics survey as the tool to conduct basic qualitative research study to guarantee clear and concise responses from the participants. The participants' responses allowed me the opportunity to transparently analyze and create a narrative from the outcome of the confidential Qualtrics survey. Each of the participants' responses to all 13 of the questions from the confidential Qualtrics survey was analyzed and compared in the analysis results in Chapter 4 of this study.

Throughout the application of administering this basic qualitative research study, I intentionally sought out marginalized students who graduated from the same high school in the



Pacific Northwest region of the U.S in 2015 or 2016 who immediately transitioned into attending a 4-year college within different regions of the U.S. I analyzed and interpreted the participants' direct responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey to establish dependability, reliability, and transparency for this basic qualitative research study. By using the participants' direct responses to the Qualtrics survey it ensured trustworthiness of the data collected, which led to a true depiction of the participants' experiences as a marginalized student during their freshman and sophomore years in college.

### **Expected Findings**

I presumed at least 10 out of the 15 prospective participants would consider participating in this basic qualitative research study. I expected the findings from participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey to show that all participants struggled to be successful academically or socially during their first 2 years of college. I believed the results of the confidential Qualtrics would reveal that the first-generation participants in this basic qualitative research study desired mentorship during their college experience, especially during their freshman year. The findings of this basic qualitative research study laid the groundwork for me to conduct an ethnographic study or cross-sectional study at some point in the near future.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, Creswell (2013) believed, individuals seek understanding through their own experiences. According to Sullivan and Sargeant (2011) qualitative research methods explore, describe, or generate theories based on social concepts and human intentions. In education, qualitative research aims to comprehend how learning happens through the examination of small groups of learners with a focus on each individual participants' experience (Sullivan & Sargeant, 2011). Qualitative research tries to explain an interconnection or

relationship. Sullivan and Sargeant stated qualitative research focuses on an individual case, whereas quantitative research focuses on variables.

My role as the researcher for this basic qualitative research study was to create the methodology and ensure its validity. The participants for this basic qualitative research study were selected purposefully to guarantee transparency and validity of the study. When I sought prospective participants, I asked about their cultural background, current economic standing, and whether they were a first-generation student. Each participant of this basic qualitative research study continued their education to pursue their bachelor's degree at a 4-year college in the U.S during the fall semester following their high school graduation.

The instrument used for this basic qualitative research study was a confidential Qualtrics survey. The time frame for participants to complete the confidential Qualtrics survey was 3 weeks, which allowed participants ample time to respond to the survey. The participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey was examined for dissimilarities, emerging themes, saturation, along with unforeseen replies. After I completed the analysis of the participants' responses to the Qualtrics survey all documents were shredded, then recycled.

One of the limitations in implementing a basic qualitative research study is the time-span in which the study takes place is short lived. Using a confidential Qualtrics survey as the instrument for this basic qualitative research study ensured prospective participants' responses were direct and honest. All prospective participants for this basic qualitative research study classified themselves as a marginalized student. Although participants attended different colleges within the U.S., many responses to the questions from the confidential Qualtrics survey were saturated because of the participants' classification as marginalized students that grew up in the same geographical region, which further proves the validity of this basic qualitative research

study. The findings for this basic qualitative research study were detailed, planned, and executed in a clear and concise manner. In order to bracket my personal responses, thoughts, and maintain a steadfast awareness to my own biases when analyzing the data, I kept a reflective journal throughout the process of conducting this basic qualitative research study. I expected the findings from participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey to show that all participants struggled to be successful academically or socially during their freshman and sophomore years in college. Chapter 4 will cover the Data Analysis Plan, Description of the Sample, Research Methodology and Analysis, Summary of the Findings, and a Presentation of the Data and Results of this basic qualitative research study.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

Marginalized freshman and sophomore college students face challenges such as adapting to cultural awareness, utilizing resources, and adjusting to new environments. Though the number of marginalized college students is on the rise, many marginalized college students struggle to find and maintain a sense of stability academically and socially during their first 2 years of college. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore how marginalized students' ability to succeed is impacted during freshman and sophomore years of college.

Chapter 4 consists of a description of the sample of the participants for this basic qualitative research study and an extensive analysis of the research methodology. Also included in Chapter 4 is a summary of the findings and a thorough presentation of the data. Chapter 4 is concluded with the results of the findings for this basic qualitative research study.

### **Description of the Sample**

According to Maramba and Velasquez (2012), a student of color is any college student not classified as Caucasian. Out of the 15 participants in this basic qualitative research study, nine of the participants classified themselves as students of color, two of the participants classified themselves as Caucasian, and four participants did not respond. Payne (2003) stated a student of poverty is a college student that does without necessary resources that influence academic achievement such as financial, emotional, spiritual, physical, support systems, and role models. In this basic qualitative research study eight of the participants defined themselves as students of poverty, while three of the participants expressed they are not a student of poverty. In accordance with Maramba and Velasquez's definition of a student of color and Payne's meaning of student of poverty, six of the 11 participants disclosed they were both a student of

color and poverty. In this basic qualitative research study nine of the 11 participants asserted they were first-generation college students according to Smith's (2015) definition, a student whose parents did not earn a college degree. Each of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study decided to enroll in either a private or public 4-year university in the United States directly after their high school graduation to gain their bachelor's degree. The location of each participant for this basic qualitative research study varied, depending on the participant's location when taking part in the study. Each of the participants also graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. during the 2015 or 2016 school years.

### **Methodology**

In the initial email sent out to participants from the Qualtrics website, a message was included reiterating the confidential and voluntary nature of the survey. I contacted 15 marginalized students that graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. in 2015 or 2016. Each participant moved on to pursue their bachelor's degree at a private or public 4-year college in the U.S. during the fall semester following their high school graduation. Throughout the recruitment process I aimed to keep the number participants for this basic qualitative research study small, in order to keep this study deliberate, focused, and methodical. After the 3-week window participants were given to respond to the confidential Qualtrics survey 11 of the 15 prospective participants completed the survey. The participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey provided data, which allowed me to interpret data using both open, axial coding, and selective coding. I analyzed the data to explore dissimilarities, emerging themes, saturation, similarities, and unforeseen responses. Creswell (2013) stated qualitative research allows for the collection of data to be analyzed for themes and perspectives of the participants. The findings of the data from participants' responses to the

confidential Qualtrics survey in this basic qualitative research study were compared to the findings of both the theorists in the conceptual framework and the review of researched literature in Chapter 2 of this basic qualitative research study.

### **Coding**

After all of the participants' responses were collected from the confidential Qualtrics survey, I explored the data through open, axial, and selective coding. Appendix B includes a chart with the results of open, axial, and selective coding. The first step used in the process of analyzation was open coding. During the process of opening coding I read through the data multiple times and created labels for chunks of the data which summarized the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey. Throughout the process of open coding I used the participants' responses to the six primary research questions from the confidential Qualtrics survey to chunk the data:

1. What impacts marginalized students' ability to be successful during freshman and sophomore years in college?
2. How do high school experiences impact marginalized students' freshman and sophomore years in college?
3. What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?
4. What challenges impacted marginalized freshmen and sophomore student success in college?
5. How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems and resources during their freshman and sophomore years in college?

6. What support systems and resources are available for marginalized freshman and sophomore students on college campuses?

**What impacts marginalized students' ability to be successful during freshman and sophomore years in college?** After reading through the data multiple times the result led to two open codes, the ability to be successful and the struggle to be successful. The open code for the ability to be successful included: going to class and studying, while examples from the participants' words included trial and error, finding outlets, and working through obstacles. The second open code for this chunk of data was the struggle to be successful. The open code the struggle to be successful included: not going to class or study, not trying new study habits, and not doing well on exams. Examples from the participants' words included: slacking in class, failure to keep a routine and not studying enough, and mixing up priorities and not doing enough to do well on exams.

**How do high school experiences impact marginalized students' freshman and sophomore years in college?** The results from the data led to two open codes, transitioning from high school and transitioning from the freshman experience. The developed code transitioning from high school included: finding new friends, missing home, and studying habits, while examples from the participants' words included afraid to be vulnerable and meet new people, loved the independence, missed the comfort of family, self-conscious about asking for help, and learning new study techniques. The second open code for this chunk of data was transitioning from the freshman experience. The open code transitioning from the freshman experience included: found new social groups, learned from previous missteps, and used resources provided by the college. Examples from the participants' words included: befriended

more people and found a comfort zone, focused on self-care, and more challenging, focused on getting grades up.

**What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?** The results from the data led to one open code, success during freshman and sophomore years. The open code success during freshman and sophomore years included: using resources provided by college, finding new social outlets, managing time, and doing well academically, while examples from the participants' words included doing well academically and getting help from the teaching assistant (TA) for my classes, feeling satisfied with the time and effort put forward, and getting good grades, and growing as a person.

**What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?** The results from the data led to one open code, failure during freshman and sophomore years. The open code failure during freshman and sophomore years included: not studying, mismanaging time, and struggling to find social outlets, while examples from the participants' words included attacking an exam with new studying tactics, not taking the time to study more or do enough to be successful, and being fixated on home instead of college.

**How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems and resources during their freshman and sophomore years in college?** The results from the data led to two open codes, use of support systems and use of resources. The open code use of support systems included: mentorship was not worthy of time and did not know how to ask for help, while examples from the participants' words include mentor was not impactful or helpful and the college didn't provide a mentor, didn't think it was an option. The second open code for this chunk of data was use of resources. The open code use of resources included: used the



writing center regularly and did not know all the readily available resources. Examples from the participants' words included: learned about the writing center in English 101, it helped my writing skills, found the tutoring center, it helped with different classes, and no, I wish I would've, fitting in, and learning to use my resources was problem my freshman year.

**What support systems are resources are available for marginalized freshman and sophomore students on college campuses?** The results from the data led to two open codes, support systems available and resources available. The open code support systems available included: some systems are readily available, students do not know how to access many of the readily available support systems, and professors' office hours, while examples from the participants' words include the diversity center was big for me, many of the people looked like me, no, I should've used the diversity center since fitting in was a problem, and going to office hours made me do a lot better in class and on my essays because I was never afraid to ask questions. The second open code for this chunk of data was resources available. The open code use of resources available included: the writing center and the tutoring center. Examples from the participants' words include: I've always struggled with writing papers and the writing center helped me to become an A student in my English classes, went to the math center, biology tutoring and accounting tutoring, and I figured that if I was investing this much time and money into my education.

The chart located in Appendix B shows examples recorded from the participants' responses, along with each open code. The second step applied in the process of analyzation for this basic qualitative research study was axial coding. I utilized axial coding to reaffirm the concepts to share the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, and to explore the relationships among the open codes. Each axial code for this basic qualitative research study

is based on an open code founded from the results of the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey.

The first axial code for this basic qualitative research study was founded in the participants' belief in their ability to be successful during their freshman and sophomore years in college. This axial code is tied to the participants' ability to be successful and struggle to be successful in college. The second axial code, learning how to successfully transition to college reflected the open codes transitioning from high school and transitioning from the freshman experience. The third axial code, successful experiences correlated to the open code success during freshman and sophomore years in college. The fourth axial code, learning how to be successful, despite failures was tied to the open code failure during freshman and sophomore years in college. Axial code five, finding support systems and resources was linked to the open codes use of support systems and use of resources. And the sixth axial code, learning how to use support systems and resources correlated to open codes support systems and resources available.

The final step used during the process of analyzing the data was selective coding. I used selective coding in order to identify key concepts and variables from the participants' responses to the data from the confidential Qualtrics survey. Despite the presence of numerous open and axial codes throughout this basic qualitative research study, the results led to one selective code. The selective code established from the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey was finding the ability to succeed during freshman and sophomore year in college.

Creswell (2013) said the goal of qualitative research allows for participants' sentiments towards the condition of a study to be explained and interpreted. As stated by Creswell, a qualitative study can explore the depth of an individual or a group of people bounded by time as the researcher uses various methods of data collection throughout an uninterrupted period.

Brown, Gielen, Gibbons, and Kuriansky (2017) stated the number of marginalized students enrolled in private and public 4-year colleges has gradually grown throughout time. Yet, the number of marginalized students who graduated from private and public colleges has not increased. Despite the increase in the number of marginalized students attending 4-year colleges in the U.S., 90% of marginalized students are not academically successful during the first-term they are enrolled as college students (Zinshteyn, 2016). Each of the participant's responses were coded as: Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 in a randomized numerical order after all 11 of the participants' responses were received. As the researcher for this basic qualitative research study it was my duty to ensure the identity of the participants remained confidential. Therefore, I decided to randomize the order in which participants' responses were coded to further ensure zero personal identifying information was present in the participants' responses to the survey.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The results from the survey showed that 82% of the participants shared the desire to make a better life for their future, which in turn would empower them to better support their current and future families. Participant 11 who is both a student of color and poverty stated, "I wanted to go to a 4-year college because I knew it was the best opportunity and essentially one of the only ways for me to support my family and myself financially." While Participant 2, a student of poverty said, "I want to provide for my family, be well off in the future, make a difference in the world, have a career(s), have a job where I can still enjoy my life and not be as tired as my parents." Both responses were comparable to the response of Participant 10, a student of color and poverty who communicated, "Also, working towards my career will help me

provide for my family financially.” Participants 2, 10, and 11 answers were all similar, even though each of the participants did not classify themselves as both a student of color and student

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

**What made you want to attend a 4-year college?** Participant 7 a student of color and poverty asserted, “I excelled in academics and wanted to further my education.” Like Participant 7, Participant 1, a student of color divulged, “My passion in law enforcement and wanting to make a change in the pattern of my family not attending college.” Participants 7 and 1 both believed furthering their education at a 4-year college in the U.S. would help them change the outlook of their futures, which was like the responses of Participants 2, 10, and 11 who believed attending a 4-year college would afford all three participants the opportunity to assist their families financially. Though Participants 1, 2, 7, and 11 are first-generation college students each of the participants put a premium on the notion that earning their bachelor’s degree will open more career opportunities. Participants 1, 2, 7, and 11 all mentioned they watched their parents struggle to make ends meet financially, which in turn has empowered all four participants to strive not to live paycheck to paycheck as Participant 2 clarified.

**What was the most difficult part of their transition from senior year in high school to their freshman year in college?** One of the parallels Participants 5 and 6 who are both students of color and students of poverty had was being away from home. Participant 5 disclosed, “Being so far away from my family.” Whilst Participant 6 declared, “The most difficult part of my transition was missing home. I didn’t adjust well my first year and wanted to go home every weekend.” Participant 5 and 6 both originally struggled with being away from home when transitioning from a senior in high school to a freshman in college, while both participants described their first year as a college student as time for freedom and

experimentation to live without the rules which govern their parent's households. Like Participants 5 and 6, Participant 10 also a student of color and student of poverty maintained, "I loved the amount of freedom I had."

Besides freedom, another one of the commonalities some of the participants shared in their transition from a senior in high school to a freshman in college was the need to build better study habits. Participant 4, a student of color said, "I had to find a new study technique and only until spring quarter I realized my main mistake and realized that my regular study habits were the problem." Whereas, Participant 9, who is also a student of color expressed the transition as, "stressful. "I was trying to adjust to the fast pace of classes I had through three quarters, along with balancing my academics with social activities and working." Participants 4 and 9 each initially struggled with adjusting to the pace of college courses, yet both participants shared they are now working on improving their study habits that carried over with them from high school, to feel proud and satisfied with their growth from their freshman year in college to their sophomore year in college.

Overall, the experiences of the participants varied beyond the enjoyment of freedom and the need of improving study habits when transitioning from a high school graduate to a freshman year in college. Participant 1, a student of color, professed, "My first year was hard socially. I had to stick to people who looked like me and grew up like me. It is what kept me at home." Whereas Participant 11 a student of color and student of poverty tried to transition from being homesick to assimilate to a new culture, by trying to meet new friends and learning to be content with new surroundings. Like Participants 1 and 11, Participant 2, a student of poverty expressed, "I did very, very well academically first quarter and was very pleased with myself. I learned how much time and effort and studying to put in a class." Participant 2 believed their success

during their first quarter of college was attributed to excitement of starting a new experience and the desire of wanting to be able to help their parents financially in the near future

**What resources and support systems did you use during your freshman and sophomore years in college?** Out of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study, 9 of them imparted that they have used at least one campus resource throughout their first 2 years of college. The responses ranged between the tutoring center, writing center, diversity center, and the office hours of professors. Participants 3, 5, 8, 9, and 11 consistently used the writing center, tutoring center, or both. And Participants 1, 6, 7, and 11 all students of color used comparable cultural centers present on their college campuses such as the Ethnic Center, the Diversity Center, or African American Center, while Participant 10 who is both a student of color and poverty stated “No. I didn’t utilize any of those resources my freshman year. I realized that I should’ve taken advantage of the diversity center, since fitting in was a problem.” Feeling overwhelmed, out of place, and in the minority during their freshman year are some of the reasons Participant 10 stated kept them from seeking mentorship, study assistance, and social outlets. Unlike Participants 1, 6, 7, and 11, Participant 10 did not take advantage of the opportunity to get involved in their campus community because, “I did not join any clubs or sports I didn’t feel comfortable doing that. I hesitated to join any clubs my freshman year because it was hard making new friends.”

Beyond not using any of the resources provided on campus during their freshman year in college, Participants 2 and 10 were not involved with any clubs, sports, or campus activities during their freshman year in college. Yet, both participants explained their high school experiences taught them the importance of being involved in community. Both Participant 2 and Participant 10 also did not seek any form of mentorship during their freshman year in college.

Furthermore, each of the two participants noted their excitement for what their sophomore year in college has brought to the table. Participant 2 and Participant 10 hope to be more outgoing by befriending more people, finding an internship, volunteer opportunities, or a job.

**What support systems were available to you as a marginalized student?** Precisely 9 of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study were first-generation college students. Though 5 out of the 9 first-generation participants for this basic qualitative research study divulged they were assigned some form of a mentor from their college, 4 of those 5 participants stated the mentorship was not impactful or intentional. Even though 9 of the 11 participants for this basic qualitative research study were first-generation college students, each of the participants who were assigned a mentor by their college shared that the form of mentorship they were provided from their differing colleges was either absent or inefficient. Regardless if the participants were first-generation students or not, each of them came to their own conclusion that the only knowledge they had of navigating college was learning how to get into one. Participant 2 believed all students at their high school were done a disservice because mentorship was readily available throughout their entire high school experience, whereas in college mentor programs had to be sought out. Participant 2 also mentioned that many current 4-year college students' parents attended college; therefore, those students had some advantage first-generation college students lacked, particularly if they were not assigned a mentor or understand how to seek a mentor. Although all 11 of the participants in this basic qualitative research study basic qualitative research study noted having a purposeful mentor could have possibly helped alleviate some of the stresses of transitioning from a senior in high school, to a freshman, then sophomore in college, none of the 11 participants defined their experiences as a failure based upon the definition of failure each participant shared in responding to the

confidential Qualtrics survey. Participant 10 defined failure as mixing up priorities, while Participant 1 explained failure as moving on from something that needs to be worked on, and Participant 3 expounded failure as giving up and not being willing to test new study habits to correct mistakes.

**What is your definition of success when reflecting upon your freshman and sophomore year in college?** Participant 6 asserted, “I am successful because I have endured through some hard years of my young adult life, and that I am still here.” Whereas Participant 11 proclaimed finding outlets in the campus community such as: BSU, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), and meeting new people made the transition to college more enjoyable. Whilst in comparison to Participants 6 and 11, Participant 3 stated “My definition of success is not only succeeding and obtaining good grades but to also grow as a person as I embark on this journey.”

Despite the reality that each of the participants in this basic qualitative research study experienced some form of struggle during their freshman or sophomore years at a 4-year college in the U.S., each participant also accomplished some level of success. Although each of the 11 participants of this basic qualitative research study defined success based upon their own experiences, each of the participants experienced some form of success since enrolling in a 4-year college in the U.S. seeing that each participant in this basic qualitative research study has transitioned from being a high school graduate, to a freshman, then sophomore in college. Regardless of each participant’s marginalization as a student of color, student of poverty, or both, each of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study has successfully sustained their college education for 2 years.



## **Summary**

First and second year college students face challenges such as adapting to cultural awareness, utilizing resources, improving study habits, connecting with new people, and adjusting to new environments. Though the number of marginalized college students is on the rise, many marginalized college students struggle to find and maintain a sense of stability academically and socially during their first 2 years of college.

All 11 of the participants in this basic qualitative research study were from marginalized backgrounds, with 9 participants being students of color, while 8 participants were living as students of poverty, and 6 participants describing themselves both. Although each of the participants in this basic qualitative research study graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. in 2015 or 2016 the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey provoked a wide-range of responses from each participant that completed the survey during the allotted 3 week window to voluntarily participate.

In the confidential Qualtrics survey each participant of this basic qualitative research study provided their own definitions of success and failure when reflecting upon their experiences as a freshman and sophomore in college. Each of the participants also shared their desire for more opportunities of formal mentorship, seeing that exactly 9 of the 11 participants were also first-generation college students. Beyond each participant's definition of success and failure, all the participants in this basic qualitative research study shared, that despite some of their struggles such as learning how to effectively study, managing time, and moving away from home during their transition from high school to college, success was still present within each individual participant's experience.

All 11 of the participants of this basic qualitative research study are still actively in pursuit of earning their 4-year degree at a college in the U.S., notwithstanding the barriers they have overcome such as lack of meaningful mentorship, undeveloped study habits, and homesickness. Each participant in this basic qualitative research study has persevered in sustaining their experiences as a college student to move closer to acquiring their bachelor's degree.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how marginalized students' ability to succeed is impacted during freshman and sophomore years of college. By analyzing the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey using open, axial, and selective coding, I explored the purpose of this basic qualitative research study, what impacts marginalized students' ability to succeed during freshman and sophomore years in college. This concluding chapter provides a deliberation of the Results, the study's Limitations, Implications of the Results, along with Recommendations for Further Research.

### **Summary of the Results**

Freshman and sophomore college students face challenges such as adapting to cultural awareness, utilizing resources, and adjusting to new environments. Though the number of marginalized college students is on the rise, many marginalized college students struggle to find and maintain a sense of stability academically and socially during their first 2 years of college (Williams, 2014). In this basic qualitative research study 82% of the participants believed having some form of intentional formal mentorship would have helped them adjust to their freshman year in college. Though 45% of the participants of this basic qualitative research study were assigned some form of mentorship from their universities, only 20% of the participants assigned a mentor felt the mentorship was meaningful and useful. During the time I spent analyzing and interpreting the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, themes such as lack of useful mentorship, misuse of time, and lack of functional study skills emerged as the dominant variables.

## **Discussion of the Results**

According to the United States Department of Education (2016), the population of self-identified students of color enrolled in college full-time grew almost 40% from the fall of 1976 to the fall of 2014. This number is expected to progressively increase over time. Although some marginalized students chose to use the assistance offered to them from administrators, counselors, and teachers during their high school experience, those same students do not apply these services during their first or second years in college.

The transition between high school and college is inconsistent, new, and uncertain. Many marginalized students do not understand how to seek out assistance without intentional guidance and mentorship. The problem then becomes some marginalized students do not continue their college career beyond their first or second year in college because they do not fully comprehend how to use available resources provided by their college.

In this basic qualitative research study, 91% of the participants cited a lack of formal and useful mentorship as one of their major struggles in transitioning from a high school senior to a freshman in college. These results are important when considering 82% of the participants described themselves as first-generation college students. Therefore, 9 of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study struggled to understand how to fully access support systems for marginalized students during their first 2 years of college.

According to the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey, 45% of the participants were assigned some form of mentorship from their college, yet only 9% of those participants found their mentorship experience meaningful. All 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study believed a lack of comprehending the importance of using available resources such as the tutoring and writing center during their first quarter or semester of college

could have been alleviated with relevant guidance and mentorship. Through meaningful mentorship direction from faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and upper classmen students could have learned of all the support systems readily available on their college's campus. To minimize the transitional struggles during their first quarter, semester, or year of college; students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students need to know the resources and support systems which are accessible for them to sustain and a successful college experience. Though 91% of the participants in this basic qualitative research study felt they lacked intentional mentorship or any form of guidance, 82% of the participants self-navigated their college campus and learned through trial and error how to utilize resources such as cultural centers, the tutoring center, and the writing center. If all of the participants in this basic qualitative research study were matched with a meaningful mentor during their transition from a high school senior, to a freshman in college, perhaps all 11 of the participants would have made a seamless transition during their freshman year of college which would lead to a successful sophomore year of college.

### **Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature Review**

Kezar and Eckel (2010) stated extra support in the form of mentorship, tutoring, and community outreach is needed to sustain, engage, and empower students of color and students of poverty at 4-year colleges throughout the U.S. The results from the survey for this basic qualitative research study showed 91% of participants acknowledged and agreed with Kezar and Eckel's sentiment about the importance the role of an intentional mentor could have played in helping to bridge the transition from high school to college. Castleman and Terry (2016) asserted it is important that all involved parties try to support students that are marginalized both culturally and financially, to build a solid community of student learners in every facet of

education in order for students to feel supported and successful. Though 45% of the participants in this basic qualitative research study shared they were paired with some form of mentorship from their respective colleges, only 9% of those participants valued their mentorship experience. While 36% of the students assigned with mentors revealed the mentor they were matched up with was not valued, because the lack of helpfulness, desire, and intentionality from the assigned mentor from their colleges.

Like Kezar and Eckel (2010), 82% of the participants in this basic qualitative research study believed extra support systems such as cultural centers, tutoring centers, and writing centers supported, engaged, and empowered participants, which also helped students to be successful during their first 2 years in college. While the other 18% of the participants in this basic qualitative research study uttered the importance of using support systems such as tutoring and writing centers to become more successful throughout the remainder of their college experiences.

Sperry (2015) expressed for all first-year college students to feel accepted and safe in their new environment social interaction with their peers is essential. Eighty-two percent of the participants in this basic qualitative research study were involved in different organizations such as Black Women's Caucus, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), Black Student Union, Latinos Unidos, Relay for Life, athletic events, and residential life. Although two of the 11 participants in this basic qualitative research study were not involved in campus life during their first year of college, each of the participants acknowledged the relevance of seeking opportunities to get involved in their college's campus life to feel more connected to their college experience.

## **Limitations**

There were certain limitations in conducting this basic qualitative research study. For this basic qualitative research study one of the limitations was that 4 of the 15 prospective participants decided not to participate in the study for unknown reasons. This factor impacted the study because having 15 participants, rather than 11 participants would have given a greater quantity of data to draw from when it was analyzed, compared, and contrasted for similarities and differences from the participants' responses to the confidential Qualtrics survey. Another limitation to this basic qualitative research study was all 11 participants graduated from the same high school in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S. in 2015 or 2016. The outcome for this basic qualitative research study was also limited because each participant's experiences during their freshman and sophomore year reflect their own individual experience at as a marginalized student at their respective 4-year college in the U.S.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The results for this basic qualitative research study revealed resources provided to marginalized students at 4-year colleges across the U.S. are pivotal to student success. The sustainability of marginalized students at 4-year colleges in the U.S. is a worthy topic for a future cross-sectional study. Although the number of marginalized students enrolled in college is on the rise throughout the U.S. according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), many of those same students do not finish their bachelor's degree.

The implementation of a cross-sectional study would afford a researcher the opportunity to delve deeper into the academic and personal successes and struggles of marginalized college students during their first 2 years of college. A cross-sectional study would enable a greater amount of time to be spent studying and analyzing literature, while also seeking out a larger

number of marginalized participants enrolled in private and public 4-year colleges in various regions of the U.S. After spending 2 years researching, writing, and analyzing this basic qualitative research study I surmise a cross-sectional study would also explain how college programs such as TRiO, The College Success Foundation's Achievers Program, Upward Bound, and other mentorship programs on college campuses evaluate the effectiveness of the programs in relation to the aspects of student success socially and academically.

This basic qualitative research study is the first step towards taking an elongated look at what the determining factors are for leveraging prosperity and sustainability for marginalized students during their first 2 years in college at a 4-year college in the U.S. At some point within the next 5 years I plan on teaming up with at least one other researcher to implement a cross-sectional study in order to research what influences the success of students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students during their freshman and sophomore years at a 4-year college in the U.S. Within the cross-sectional I also will seek out participants from different geographical regions within the U.S. to see if there are correlations between the geographical region, retention, and graduation rates amongst marginalized college students within different regions of the U.S. This future cross-sectional study will also delve into why the number of marginalized students enrolled in college within the U.S. has consistently risen throughout the past 25 years, while the graduation rate has continually decreased.

### **Conclusion**

Marginalized groups such as first-generation students, students of color, and students of poverty are blitzed with negative impressions and expectations from the onset of their college experience. Although freshman and sophomores in college are often distanced from their usual sources of academic, emotional, and social support, students do have access to new resources of



support. Integrating marginalized students into academic environments beyond the classroom that allow for connection with instructors and mentors can assist marginalized students in building confidence academically, emotionally, and socially. When marginalized students build a social network on campus, they feel connected and valued. The values that are built from feeling connected to campus life leads marginalized students to share their experiences, take academic risks, and presume ownership in their learning. Autonomy provides marginalized students the opportunity to make choices based upon their own experiences, regardless of consequence throughout their college experience. Competence allows marginalized students to develop new skills and techniques in order to overcome obstacles. While relatedness empowers marginalized students to feel connected and respected by other individuals. Marginalized students such as first-generation students, students of color, and students of poverty can be successful in their transition from high school to college. When marginalized feel connected and supported it leads to better emotional and social outcomes, which in turn, leads to enhanced levels of academic success during their freshman and sophomore experiences.

Colleges throughout the U.S. need to implement purposeful mentorship programs for students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students to engage and sustain success during their freshman and sophomore years in college. When students from a marginalized background feel connected and supported college administration, faculty, and staff they are more likely to be successful during their first 2 years of college.

Intentional guidance and mentorship during the transition from high school senior to a freshman in college would help marginalized students better understand the resources which are available to them from the onset of their college experience. When using resources which are readily available to them such as the career center, cultural centers, the tutoring center, and

writing center, marginalized students feel more connected to their campus. Beyond guidance, mentorship, and extra support, being involved in campus life helps validate their perceived place within their college experience.

As the number of marginalized students enrolled in 4-year colleges continues to steadily increase throughout the U.S., it is imperative that the stakeholders at all colleges acknowledge and implement extra support programs for students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students. Positive interactions with administration, alumni, faculty, and staff within campus life could lead to a sense of belonging for marginalized students. When support systems such as meaningful mentorship programs are put into place to intentionally empower marginalized students, students of color, students of poverty, and first-generation students feel connected and supported in order to be successful and earn their bachelor's degree.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Tables

Table 1

*Demographics of a Basic Qualitative Research Study*

Participant	<i>Student of Color</i>	<i>Student of Poverty</i>	<i>Both, a Student of Color and Poverty</i>
Participant 1	X		
Participant 2		X	
Participant 3	X		
Participant 4			X
Participant 5			X
Participant 6			X
Participant 7			X
Participant 8		X	
Participant 9	X		
Participant 10			X
Participant 11			X

Table 2

*Demographics of a Basic Qualitative Research Study*

Participant	<i>First-generation College Student</i>	<i>(Non) First-Generation College Student</i>
Participant 1	X	
Participant 2	X	
Participant 3	X	
Participant 4		X
Participant 5	X	
Participant 6	X	
Participant 7	X	
Participant 8	X	
Participant 9	X	
Participant 10		X
Participant 11	X	

## Appendix B: Open, Axial, and Selective Coding Table

*What impacts marginalized students' ability to be successful during freshman and sophomore years in college?*

Open code	Properties	Example of participants' words
Ability to be successful	Going to class and studying	Trial and error
		Finding outlets
	Learning how to study	Working through obstacles
	Doing well on exams	
Struggle to be successful	Not going to class or study	Slacking in class
	Not trying new study habits	
	Not doing well on exams	

*How do high school experiences impact marginalized students' freshman and sophomore years in college?*

Open code	Properties	Example of participants' words
Transitioning from high school	Finding new friends	Afraid to be vulnerable and meet new people
	Missing home	Loved the independence, missed the comfort of family
	Studying habits	Self-conscious about asking for help, and learning new studying techniques
Transitioning from the freshman experience	Found new social groups	Befriended more people and found a comfort zone
	Learned from previous missteps	Focused on self-care
	Used resources provided by the college	More challenging, focused on getting grades up

*What support systems and resources impacted marginalized freshman and sophomore student success in college?*

Open code	Properties	Example of participants' words
Success during freshman and sophomore years	Using resources provided by college	Doing well academically and getting help from the TA for my classes
	Finding new social outlets	Feeling satisfied with the time and effort put forward
	Doing well academically	Getting good grades and growing as a person

*What challenges impacted marginalized freshmen and sophomore student success in college?*

Open code	Properties	Example of participants' words
Failure during freshman and sophomore years	Not studying	Attacking an exam with new studying tactics
	Mismanaging time	Not taking the time to study more or do enough to be successful
	Struggling to find social outlets	Being fixated on home, instead of college

*How do marginalized students become aware and utilize support systems and resources during their freshman and sophomore years in college?*

Open code	Properties	Example of participants' words
Use of support systems	Mentorship was not worthy of time	Mentor was not impactful or helpful No, I did not, I also didn't think I was going to struggle academically because I never have before
	Mentorship was not assigned	College didn't provide a mentor, didn't think it was an option
	Did not know how to ask for help	
Use of resources	Used the writing center regularly	Learned about the writing center in English 101, it helped my writing skills
	Did not know all the readily available resources	Found the tutoring center, it helped with different classes No, I wish I would've, fitting in and learning to use my resources was problem my freshman year

## **Appendix C: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.



I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

*Ronald E. Gordon, Jr.*

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Digital Signature

Ronald E. Gordon, Jr.

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Name (Typed)

07/24/2018

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Date