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Perceptions of Recipients of a Florida High School Dropout Prevention Program's Scholarship About the Influence of Mentoring and Student Advocacy on Success and Persistence in Higher Education

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Perceptions of Recipients of a Florida High School Dropout Prevention Program's Scholarship about the Influence of Mentoring and Student Advocacy on Success and Persistence in Higher Education

by
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Tracy L. Johnston under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

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Abstract

Perceptions of Recipients of a Florida High School Dropout Prevention Program's Scholarship about the Influence of Mentoring and Student Advocacy on Success and Persistence in Higher Education. Tracy L. Johnston, 2015: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler School of Education. Eric Descriptors: College Persistence, Student Success, Mentoring, Student Advocacy, Academic Success, Poverty Reduction

This applied dissertation was designed to help a specific Florida high school dropout prevention program better understand the factors that influence the postsecondary persistence rates of their scholarship recipients. The program administrators want to explore the scholarship recipients' perceptions regarding the role of mentoring and student advocacy in his/her academic success or college persistence. To understand the scholarship recipients experience better, a mixed methods study was conducted with current program scholarship recipients to gain insight into the individual student's perception of factors including mentoring and student advocacy that influenced student success and completion in college.

Information gained from the student perceptions will help program administrators develop additional interventions that promote continued student success and academic retention, persistence, and graduation. Perceptions reported by scholarship recipients regarding student success and persistence will provide the organization insight into the development of future program initiatives designed to increase the postsecondary success of the program participants. Additionally, this study will fill a gap in the research regarding the experiences and benefits of sustained mentoring on academic success and long-term poverty reduction.

The results of the study support that the Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program should consider implementing an organizational success strategy of providing student support services to all scholarship recipients the first semester of postsecondary education, as well as consider developing an ongoing evaluative process to determine which scholarship recipients would benefit from ongoing postsecondary student support services. FMSP should strengthen the organizational focus on college readiness in the high school program participants, specifically encouraging the students to enroll in advanced and Advanced Placement courses. Further, FMSP should consider the implementation of a mentor-training program that could augment the academic support and guidance currently provided by the student advocates. Finally, the study results suggest that Florida Mentoring Scholarship program should consider and develop success strategies that target the specific geographic, gender, racial, and ethnic differences and needs of the scholarship recipients.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically, the United States was the world leader in educational attainment. Over the last decade, the United States has dropped to number twelve in the percentage of young adults who have obtained a postsecondary degree when compared to other industrialized nations (Lee, Edwards, Menson, & Rawls, 2011). A global initiative to have member countries demonstrate a minimum 55% average in postsecondary achievement at the associate's level by the year 2025 was launched by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Lee et al., 2011). In 2009, only 41.1% of American young adults had achieved at least an associate's degree (Lee et al., 2011). If the United States hopes to remain competitive with other industrialized nations or to be able to meet projected domestic workforce demands, high school and college graduation rates must dramatically improve (Amos, 2013; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Global and national economic stability in a 21st century postindustrial knowledge economy is contingent upon the human capital accumulation of the populace (Carnevale et al., 2010; International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis [IIASA], 2008; Matthews, 2012). National investment in postsecondary education will facilitate the development of an educated and trained workforce able to meet the demands of an economy based on technological information and scientific advances (Amos, 2013; IIASA, 2008; Matthews, 2012).

Background Information

In 1995, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit was established forming a public-private partnership with the public education system to increase high school graduation rates, while concurrently decreasing crime and poverty for at-risk, low-income students. This dropout prevention, poverty reduction scholarship and mentoring program, which will

now be referred to as the *Florida Mentoring and Scholarship Program* (FMSP) has served more than 22,000 low-income students in all 67 counties located within the state of Florida (Take Stock in Children [TSIC], 2012a). Using a complex student success strategy, this program addresses multiple social issues simultaneously. A foundation of this dropout prevention program is a unique advocacy model that provides wraparound student support services to program participants. These student support services include providing a mentor and the monitoring of the student's academic achievement, behavior, and environmental stressors by a program student advocate.

Trained community-based mentors meet weekly with the student providing moral support and encouragement. While student advocates monitor the student's progress and implement individualized interventions to increase student success, both in and out of the school environment. Student advocates are referred to as a *College Success Coach* (CSC) within the program. Student advocates also provide program participants with the academic counseling and guidance needed to complete high school successfully and to develop the skills necessary to successfully transition to a postsecondary educational setting. Upon high school graduation, students who participate in this dropout prevention program receive a college scholarship (TSIC, 2006, 2009a, 2012a, 2013, 2014).

FMSP administrators understand the risk factors associated with high school dropouts; however, the organization chooses to focus on the *human capital* potential of the program participants. Johnson (2005) defined *human capital* as a term that utilizes the concept of financial investment to create an analogy illustrating investment in the education or training of the workforce to create higher productivity. When an individual acquires new knowledge, skills, and abilities, the productivity potential for this individual increases. In turn, this new knowledge and skill set results in a higher individual income

for the labor tasks required. Consequently, there is an absence of the traditional terminology utilized to describe the at-risk students in FMSP's published literature. Program administrators also recognize high school graduation rates, coupled with matriculation to postsecondary education, are arguably the key components necessary for future economic stability. FMSP's mission statement emphasizes the organizational objective:

> To passionately promote personal growth, self-responsibility, and academic success for deserving low-income children by providing a unique set of resources… Our purpose is to prepare and develop our students to be successful people, focused on being their best, and contributing members of society…. Achieving this goal will result in an improved quality of life for all of our stakeholders. (Take Stock in Children, 2006, p. 1)

An important organizational responsibility of the staff and volunteers is the selection of the program scholarship recipients. Therefore, the goal of the scholarship selection process is to enable the local program administrators to select students who will receive the most benefit from program participation, based upon the published organizational goals and mission. Achievement of statewide program consistency is the result of the standardization of the basic criteria for student selection and the subsequent dissemination of the standards to the local program directors. Members of the program selection committees evaluate the potential program participants based upon specific criteria. Program guidelines recommend that (a) the student is recommended by the school guidance counselor, (b) the student qualifies for the free and reduced lunch program, (c) the student must have a GPA of 2.5 or higher, and (d) the student must meet the program's identified environmental risk factors. Risk factors identified by the members of the selection committee include, but are not limited to, (a) single-parent homes, (b) parents in prison, (c) multiple siblings, (d) neither parent graduating from high

school, (e) English as a second language, and (f) multiple school absences (TSIC, 2005).

Students selected to participate in the program receive either a 2- or a 4-year college scholarship. Program administrators decide the type of scholarship awarded to the participant based upon participant selection guidelines specific to the local program. One program consideration influencing the scholarship awarded is available program funding. Another consideration influencing the type of scholarship is student grade level. Finally, the scholarship is contingent upon the student and the parent/caregiver signing a contract committing to academic achievement, as well as to remain crime and drug free (TSIC, 2004).

FMSP has evolved into a forward-thinking dropout prevention program that is expanding its mission to include college participants. From an organizational perspective, one consideration is whether the positive impact of mentoring is consistent with current theory or is more developmental in nature. Effective mentoring might span an entire lifetime, rather than a small period of time (Eby & Allen, 2009). One aspect the program administrators might consider is developing a multi-level mentoring strategy, such as positioning past mentees to become future mentors. This approach would allow prior scholarship recipients to utilize the communication, leadership, and social skills they acquired through program participation. Additionally, it is believed that the program administrators should more actively explore the role of gender, culture, race, and diversity on success of the mentor-mentee relationship. While not addressed within the body of this paper, it is important to consider that some research, (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Eby & Allen, 2009) negates the impact of gender, race, developmental issues, or other risk factors as significant. Instead, this research indicates that socio-economic factors were the primary moderating factors influencing student

success (DuBois et al., 2004; Eby & Allen, 2009).

In an effort to understand the program dynamics better, the leadership initiated an internal organizational review of specific variables that might impact the success of program participants. Mills, Ring, and Wright (2008) analyzed program variables, including gender, ethnicity, race, geographic location, high school graduation, and the probability of matriculated program participants attempting college. A performance analysis found that African American participants were 13.9% less likely to attempt college in comparison to the rest of the target population. Geographical differences were also noted; program participants who lived in north and central Florida were 12.2 % more likely to attempt college (Mills et al., 2008). Organizationally, the FMSP would benefit from understanding the factors that contribute to the gender, racial, and geographical discrepancies noted in the research study.

Gender

Gender was one of the variables Mills et al. (2008) analyzed. The results of their analysis indicated a two-to-one ratio of females to males in regards to program participants. Given the large discrepancy in gender participation, it is important to understand the unique social identities and communication patterns of the different genders. Consideration of the role of the participant's gender will aid in developing successful mentoring strategies.

There has been significant research conducted in the area of gender and student achievement. Current research studies (Dee, 2007) indicate same-gender teacher assignments increase a student's academic achievement. Theoretically, these same gender implications would also apply to youth mentoring situations. Therefore, same gender mentor assignment of program participants would better address issues of stereotyping

and gender bias, while providing valuable role modeling behaviors (Dee, 2007). Incorporating the different gender communication traits and styles successfully into the program guidelines will also increase effective communication patterns between the mentor and mentee, which in turn will positively affect the mentoring relationship (Richmond & McCroskey, 2009).

In essence, mentoring organizations need to consider how to develop gender-specific mentoring relationships (Darling, Bogor, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006). Although adolescent boys and girls have different communication styles, both genders have a need for meaningful conversations. Although an adolescent boy mentee might not ask for help, he, like an adolescent girl, responds to conversations and communication strategies that have a sense of relevance. However, each gender has a different set of effective communication strategies. For example, adolescent girls seek to form lasting, intimate relationships, placing high social value on developing a sense of connection. Therefore, pairing girls with mentors who are able to make a multi-year commitment would be optimal. Conversely, adolescent boys place value on mentoring activities that are more physicality interactive (Darling et al., 2006).

Race, Culture, or Ethnicity

Racial, cultural, and ethnic demographics of the dropout prevention program participants vary on an annual basis. The 2012 and 2013 program overview indicated 33% of the scholarship recipients were African American, 38% were Caucasian, 25% were Hispanic, and 4% were Asian (TSIC, 2012a, 2013). Just as gender differences influence the formation of social identities, an individual's cultural, racial, or ethnic background also contributes to the development of successful mentoring relationships. Darling et al. (2006) indicated that mentoring programs should consider four factors to

understand the impact of the participant's ethnic or racial background on mentor-mentee assignment. Factor one--program administrators need to consider the participant's sense of belonging to his or her ethnic group during the mentor-mentee paring process. Factor two--program administrators should possess an awareness of the participants' ethnic identity versus racial identity. A participant's ethnic identity has the potential to affect the development of a positive mentoring relationship. Although the mentor and the mentee might both be Asian, it is conceivable that a first generation Chinese mentee would find ethnicity relevant, while the third generation Korean would show no significant ethnic identification. The third factor pertains to a participant's understanding of his/her ethnicity in relationship to his/her cultural context. For example, if a participant's racial or ethnic culture does not positively promote academic success, this particular participant might need extra support emphasizing the value of educational persistence. A final factor to consider when determining a mentee/mentor pairing is the culture of a mentee and a mentor. Successful mentoring relationships sometimes are enhanced by a perception of cultural understanding and support.

Program managers of successful mentoring programs understand the importance of ethnocentrism on group identification, the subsequent development of positive relationships, and ultimately effective communication in mentoring relationships. Cultural implications are significant in cultivating lasting and meaningful mentoring relationships (Alexander, 2009). One sociological implication worth considering is the cultural difference noted between the value set of collectivism and individualism (Richmond & McCroskey, 2009). A value set of collectivism is more common in individuals or groups who descended from cultures with Asian, Hispanic, and African origins, than in individuals or groups who descended from western European cultures

(Taras et al., 2014).

There is not a commonly accepted definition of *individualism* and *collectivism* (Taras et al., 2014). Originally, Hofstede (1980) defined *individualism* as "a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and of their immediate families only" (p. 45) and *collectivism* as "a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups, and expect their in-groups to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to it" (p. 45). However, Taras et al. (2014) reported the definitions offered by Singelis (1994) are the most cited in the literature. Singelis (1994) defined *individualism* as a "bonded, unitary, and stable self that is separate from social context" (p. 581) and collectivism as a "flexible, variable self that emphasizes statuses, belonging and fitting in, and being in indirect communication" (p. 581). Understanding potential influences of these differing value sets has both long-term and widespread implications to mentoring organizations. Additionally, it is important to understand the role of cultural mistrust within the mentor-mentee relationships because individuals who exhibit a high level of ethnocentrism might be reluctant to develop a positive mentoring relationship with a mentor who has a different cultural background (Richmond & McCroskey, 2009).

The Six Student Success Components of the Dropout Prevention Program

The FSMP administrators have developed six student success strategies (TSIC, 2012b). These strategies serve as the foundation for the program guidelines throughout the state. First, the student must demonstrate a personal commitment to success by acknowledging self-accountability. When the student accepts the college scholarship, he/she agrees to specific performance expectations, such as (a) to remain in school, (b) to maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.5, (c) to remain crime and drug free, and

(d) to meet with his/her assigned mentor on a weekly basis. The student understands that he/she could lose his/her scholarship if he/she fails to meet the basic program standards (TSIC, 2012b).

While economic influences contribute to the high dropout rate of low-income students (Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007; TSIC, 2009b), a lack of consistent familial encouragement and support might be more important than economic influences as a variable contributing to student failure (Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007). With consideration of this information, the second component of the student success plan is encouraging parent or guardian participation in their child's educational activities. Parents and guardians of the program participants are expected to support their children by becoming involved in all aspects of the educational process (TSIC, 2012b).

Mentors are the third component in FSMP's student success program (TSIC, 2012b). The mentoring model used by FMSP matches at-risk students with adult mentors, which often has positive outcomes with youth, specifically in the areas of academic performance, attitudes, behavior problems, and family relationships (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Grise, Fisher, Chen, & Drennan, 2007; McDonald, Erickson, Johnson, & Elder, 2007). Therefore, to improve the potential for the participant's academic success, each student is paired with a trained volunteer mentor who meets with the student one hour per week during the school year, offering the student motivation and hope (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Grise et al., 2007; Mills et al., 2008; TSIC, 2005, 2012b). The fourth student success strategy employed by this program is the provision of staff student advocates, whose primary responsibility is to ensure the student's continued success, while also maintaining the required program administration documentation (TSIC, 2012b). While branded a mentoring scholarship program, the student advocate is a main source of

support to the program participants. A student advocate adopts the role of guidance counselor, academic monitor, and formal advisor to program participants, parents, mentors, and leadership council members. Although only antidotal, program administrators believe that the assignment of a student advocate is one of the key components to the success of program participants (A. Taylor, personal communication, January 16, 2015).

The fifth student success strategy is a college scholarship (TSIC, 2012b). As of 2013, 149 million dollars was invested in FMSP's general state prepaid college plan (TSIC, 2014). If the program participant meets all of the contractual scholarship requirements and graduates from high school, the student is awarded a college scholarship, postsecondary technical training, or a two-year technical degree in the form of a prepaid college plan. The type of scholarship the student receives is dependent upon several program strategies. Local program monies are a primary consideration in the financial amount of individual scholarship awards. From a fiscal perspective, if a local program had an effective fund raising campaign, then the program is able to award 4-year scholarships to the students selected for program participation in middle school. However, sometimes the local county program is only able to fund partial scholarships. In those cases, partial scholarships are awarded to freshmen or sophomores in high school. Additionally, individual participants are allowed to choose the postsecondary institution where they would like to attend. Program participants who successfully completed the program are allowed educational flexibility and vocational choices. For example, after high school graduation, some students who were awarded full 4-year scholarships chose to attend a two-year technical program or a workforce certificate program. Because the participants are awarded scholarships in the form of prepaid

college plans, any remaining funds in this participant's prepaid college plan can be re-deposited into the program's general prepaid college account, while waiting to be awarded to future recipients (TSIC, 2011a, 2012a, 2013, 2014).

The sixth and final student success strategy is the provision of college transition services through a student's first year of college (TSIC, 2012b). Although only supported by correlative evidence and literature reviews, formal student mentoring and advocacy are effective student success strategies (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Because FMSP is branded a mentoring program, the role of the student advocate or college success coach (CSC) is not publically emphasized. However, it is possible that the student advocate will be a primary, not secondary factor, in student success. The student advocate acts as the main liaison between the student, the school, the parent, and the mentor. Organizationally, understanding the role of the student advocate's leadership skills and effective communication strategies on participant success permits the FMSP an opportunity to identify the factors affecting student success. This comprehensive approach would position FMSP's administrators not only as innovators in the field of high school dropout prevention and youth crime reduction, but also college persistence and success. As such, further research exploring the relationship between mentoring and/or student advocacy and postsecondary academic persistence and success is warranted.

Caring adults can function as a student's mentor by offering emotional support to the child when and if difficulties in the school or home environment arise (Shore, 1995). Moreover, mentors who have developed genuine relationships with the mentees are in a position to make life-changing differences in the student's life (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Grise et al., 2007). The *social capital,* or a student's entire social network and reciprocal support system, that these children accumulate through the development of positive

relationships with caring adults facilitates the development of personal, social, and leadership skills (Castano, 2007). This development of effective life strategies provides children with the internal tools necessary to develop into competent and capable adults (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002; Meichenbaum, 2005). Mentoring relationships have been well documented by many researchers as providing positive impact on the lives of children and adolescents (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Many researchers, Hango (2007); Samuel, Bergman, and Hupka-Brunner (2013); and Tan and Goldberg (2009) have studied why some children exhibit the resilience to succeed in spite of environmental circumstances, while other children do not. Although several factors influence resilience, for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be limited to the impact of a positive emotional relationship with a nurturing adult (Nora & Crisp, 2007; Meichenbaum, 2005). While positive parental support and influence is optimal for student success, it is not always an option. Consequently, sometimes, other caring adults, such as teachers or mentors, can help foster resilience in children by either informal or formal mentoring (Meichenbaum, 2005).

The Problem Statement

Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program would like to empirically confirm the academic success, as well as identify long-term benefits from participation in the program. Currently, there is limited empirical evidence supporting that the continuation of mentoring and student advocacy services for students attending college will facilitate academic persistence. According to the 2010 National Dropout Prevention Center Model Program evaluation of the FMSP, between 1995 and 2010 there were 7,300 high school graduates, and 1,500 college graduates (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2010). Based upon the success of this program at the middle and high school level, the

organization has expanded the program objectives to include the goal of college graduation for all scholarship recipients (TSIC, 2012a, 13, 14).

Currently only 59% of the scholarship recipients who successfully participated in the program as high school students are using their college scholarships (TSIC, 2014). Originally, program administrators concentrated on implementing high school dropout prevention strategies. However, now the organization wants to understand how, or which, program variables increase postsecondary academic success. A program evaluation completed by Mills et al. (2008) identified several program variables such as gender and race that were influencing the overall program effectiveness in relationship to high school graduation. Since the program is maturing, an upward trend in the number of program participants attempting college has been noted. For example, the program evaluation completed by Mills et al. (2008) noted the second largest FMSP in the state reported a high school graduation rate of 100% in comparison to the 65% high school graduation rates of county students who did not participate in the program (Communities in Schools, 2009). Due to a continued upward trend in the college attendance by scholarship recipients, the program expanded its goals to include postsecondary education (TSIC, 2012a).

One of the variables not considered in the program analysis by Mills et al. (2008) was student readiness for college. Most students graduate from high school confident they possess the academic skill set necessary for the successful transition to college. Unfortunately, many students score below average on college placement tests in English and mathematics (American College Test [ACT], 2012, 2013, 2014; Bautsch, 2013). Complete College America (2012) reported that 51.7% of students who enter a two-year college and 19.9% of students entering a 4-year college program are required to take

remediation courses. According to the Association of Colleges and Universities, 53% of students entering college are lacking the basic skills to be successful in college (Tritelli, 2003). Consequently, these unprepared students often express a negative self-concept regarding their academic capacities, or their ability to succeed in an academic environment (Bautsch, 2013; Complete College America, 2012; Ender & Wilkie, 2000).

College retention and persistence has been a research question for decades (Hagedorn, 2005). "Measuring college student retention is complicated, confusing, and context dependent. Higher education researchers will likely never reach consensus on the 'correct' or 'best' way to measure this very important outcome" (Hagedorn, 2005, p. 91). Unfortunately, student educational decisions and paths are often complex and unique, making it difficult for an educational institution or scholarship organization to identify a student as persisting or nonpersisting. Hagedorn (2005) noted using the definitions of a college *persister* for a student who remains until degree completion, and *nonpersister*, for a student who leaves college before degree completion, would be simpler and less controversial. FMSP identifies a student as nonpersisting after three consecutive semesters of not enrolling in at least one college course (A. Taylor, personal communication, January 16, 2015).

According to Hagedorn (2005), educational researchers have traditionally defined *retention* "as staying in school until completion of a degree" (p. 4), and *dropping out* as "leaving school prematurely" (p. 4). Superficially, it would appear that retention and dropping out are opposite concepts. However, over four decades ago, Astin (1971) discussed the problems associated with simply defining dropping out as the opposite of retention. He noted that it is difficult to track student educational decisions such as to start, stop, and/or restart school, or to transfer to another institution. Tinto (1987) also

noted understanding student departure decisions are complicated because students might not view college departure as negative. Bean (1980) supported Tinto's proposal that educational goals are individual; therefore, some students might not view graduation as the end goal. Bean suggested that student retention or dropping out would be a comparison of the student's original intent to his/her educational outcome. Therefore, students would only be considered a dropout if they did not meet their individual educational goals (Hagedorn, 2005). Another factor complicating student departure rates is the inconsistency in time spans used to calculate college graduation rates. Colleges and universities use a 4-year graduation standard, the ACT uses a five-year standard, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association uses a six-year rate. There is less consensus regarding standard community college completion rates (Hagedorn, 2005).

However, due to the complexity of measuring student progress, Hagedorn (2005) discussed that researchers and program administrators need to "have multiple descriptors of phenomenon of particular interest" (p. 93). Hagedorn (2005) also discussed that student retention is more complex than the traditional definition of a student enrolling and remaining at the same academic institution. She suggested that a more accurate measure would include not only institutional retention, but also system, major (discipline), and individual course completion.

Although over twenty years old, Tinto's Theory of Social Integration (1975, 1987, 1993, 2000, 2006) and Austin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984, 1993) continue to provide the theoretical foundation for current retention and persistence research (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner, Daugherty, & Gilmore, 2013; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). According to Tinto's (1993) theory, unprepared or underprepared students experience several internal and external stressors,

such as stress from their peers, personal cultural ideologies, or either too much or too little social interaction. Additionally, while many students were successful in high school, i.e., passing their classes, and making above average grades, these students still had to take remedial courses. One possible explanation for a student's high school success and need for college remediation could be the lack of *academic rigor* in his/her high school (Di Giacomo, Linn, Monthey, Pack, & Wyatt, 2013). As with many educational concepts, there are many descriptions, but not a standardized definition of academic rigor. For the purpose of this study, high school academic rigor was defined as honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, or any other advanced academic course that is designed to prepare a student for postsecondary educational success. When a student must take remedial college courses, the student often disconnects before successfully transitioning from the high school to the college environment (Bautsch, 2013; Complete College America, 2012; Craig, 2005).

Another factor influencing the successful transition of unprepared students from high school to a postsecondary environment is the behavioral characteristics associated with the "Y" Generation. Gen-Y students, also referred to as Millennials, were born between 1981 and 2000 to parents who pampered, scheduled, and oversaw all of their activities since their birth (Amour, 2005; Black, 2010; Goldgehn, 2004). Now young adults, these students often lack the life skills for autonomy and independence, requiring extra help and support to complete even basic academic tasks without frequent educator feedback (Amour, 2005; Black, 2010).

FMSP administrators are also concerned about the significant variation in the postsecondary success rates of the scholarship recipients across the 67 state counties. For example, although the second largest FMSP program reports an 80% enrollment of the

scholarship recipients into college, only 28% of these students graduate with either an associate's or bachelor's degree (Florida State College Jacksonville [FSCJ], 2012). Internal organizational documentation indicates 81% of program participants enroll in college within six months of high school graduation, compared to the 25% enrollment rate of similar low-income students in the state. However, only 60% of these scholarship recipients are earning postsecondary degrees. The statewide persistence rate of FMSP's recipients is significant when compared to the national statistics for high-poverty students (25%) or minority students (20%) (TSIC, 2010). There is a lack of empirical evidence to indicate whether this program trend is due to the reduction of organizational social support, e.g., mentoring and student advocacy upon high school graduation, or other factors. Because matriculation to postsecondary education is a primary organizational goal, it would be valuable to understand the factors that contribute to college enrollment and success.

According to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 53% of incoming college students lack basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of English, mathematics, or reading requiring remediation (Tritelli, 2003). American College Test (ACT) has established academic benchmarks based on subject area scores that represent the level of achievement required for a student to have a 50% chance receiving a B or above, or a 75% chance of achieving a C or above in a first year college course (ACT, 2012). According to the 2013 ACT data, only 14% of Hispanic, 10% of American Indian, and 5% of African-American students met all academic benchmarks in English, reading, mathematics, and science. Further, less than 50% of Hispanic, American Indian, or African-American students achieved the academic benchmarks in any individual subject area based on the 2012-2014 testing results (ACT, 2012, 2013,

2014; Bautsch, 2013).

At-risk students are often unprepared for college, demonstrating a lack of academic preparedness and the goal commitment needed for academic success, consequently less than 25% of community college students requiring remediation earn a degree or a certificate after eight years (Bautsch, 2012). Craig (2005), in a mixed methods study, outlined indicators of student success or lack thereof as (a) grade point averages, (b) attempted but unearned credits, (c) academic probation or warning, and (d) a change in a student's enrollment status from full-time to part-time. For many students, the transition from high school to college is a challenging process (Bautsch, 2012; Complete College America, 2012). If FMSP hopes to improve the positive academic outcomes of the scholarship recipients, incorporating college remediation data collection will help identify long-term patterns and implications that will strengthen the college success of program participants.

Three areas of data analysis have been recommended by the leading retention researchers as crucial in the development and implementation of successful academic support programs for at-risk and unprepared college students. Tinto (1987) and Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo (1996) in their landmark research suggested a first area of program evaluation include a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and design of the organization's retention program, thus ensuring a design that improves student success and retention. Next, an analysis of the program dynamics designed to identify and incorporate strategies that increase college retention and persistence. Finally, the third area of program evaluation is to conduct an internal audit of organizational data to establish a pattern of program cause and effect.

FMSP has already initiated an analysis of internal student data. In 2006, the State

College Prepaid Program began publishing a usage report allowing organizational tracking of the college attendance patterns of the program participants. This report created two new data collection opportunities: (a) encouraging a former scholarship recipient to reenter college after dropping out; or (b) recycling the scholarship if a student chooses not to use his or her scholarship. In other words, the State Prepaid College Program allows the organization to combine, i.e., recycle, unused college credits from prior scholarship recipients into new prepaid scholarships (A. Taylor, February 7, personal communication, 2009). While the organization is in the initial phase of data collection, the preliminary analysis of the program is promising, providing initial statistics supporting the value of the continuation, as well as the expansion of the program to include participants who have graduated from high school (TSIC, 2010).

Currently, 41% of FMSP's scholarship recipients do not complete college (TSIC, 2012a). To understand the program participants' experience better, a mixed methods study was conducted with current scholarship recipients allowing insight into the students' perceptions of factors that influenced academic success. Additionally, to provide supporting empirical data predicting student attrition, voluntary completion of The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) was offered to the program scholarship recipients attending a multicampus state college in northeast Florida. The reported experiences of scholarship recipients regarding student success and persistence will provide the organization insight into the development of future program initiatives designed to increase postsecondary success and matriculation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to increase the program administrators' understanding of the scholarship recipients' perceptions of mentoring and student

advocacy in their academic success or college persistence. The information that was gained from the student perceptions will assist program administrators in developing additional interventions promoting student success and academic retention, persistence, and graduation. Although persistence and retention contribute to a student's graduation, it is important to remember that neither persistence nor retention guarantees a student's graduation from college (Turner & Berry, 2000). From an organizational perspective, the empirical data these measures provided will help validate the long-term success of FMSP's participants. The participant data will also be valuable to college administrators because this information will provide concrete indicators of academic success and institutional effectiveness.

Student retention research began in earnest in the 1970s with Tinto's (1975) landmark article. Tinto's Model of Student Attrition was further refined by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who noted that some factors influencing a student's decision regarding the continuation of postsecondary are inexorable, such as illness, family, or finances, and cannot be addressed simply by changing college policies. However, there are also factors encouraging student retention, such as the student feeling academically and socially connected to the college, as well as the participation in programs that support and monitor a student's progress (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Retention experts Tinto (1975); Pascarella and Terenzini (2005); and Reason, Evensen, and Heller (2009) consistently recommended a best practice guideline for student retention and persistence. A comprehensive college retention program would facilitate the development of a student support network, including tutoring, advising, and counseling. Currently, FSMP scholarship recipients receive student mentoring and advocacy services. However, these services have not been confirmed as the key program factor that contributes to the long-

term success of the participants. As such, further research into the actual role that these factors play in regards to student success was warranted (Grise et al., 2007; Mills et al., 2008; TSIC, 2005).

Because only 59% of the FMSP's scholarship recipients complete college, this study helped identify some factors that influence the student success or persistence of the scholarship recipients (TSIC, 2014). This study provided additional information to program administrators who want to evaluate if postsecondary expansion of student services through the first year of college contributes to student success and persistence. Finally, this study provided insight into overall long-term efficacy of the scholarship program from the student perspective. Study participants were FMSP's scholarship recipients who attended a multiple-campus state college in North Florida during the Spring 2014 academic semester. These students were part of a FMSP initiative monitoring the benefits of continuing postsecondary student support services.

Terms

For the purpose of this applied dissertation, several terms were defined.

Academic efficacy. This term refers to a student's confidence in his/her academic skills and potential outcomes (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Academic integration. This term refers to a student's positive views of his/her own academic growth, an awareness of the role of education in career choice, and positive perceptions of the college instructors and coursework (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Academic motivation. This term refers to a student's enjoyment of academic tasks and a willingness to devote extra time and energy to learning (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Advising. This term refers to a student's positive views of advising and

communication (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

At-risk Students. This term refers to students who are determined to be eligible for free/reduced lunch plus at least one of the risk factors listed in the initial FMSP application: (a) single-parent homes, (b) incarcerated parent, (c) English as a second language, (d) multiple siblings, (e) neither parent graduated from high school, (f) multiple school absences, or (g) student would be a first-generation college student (TSIC, 2012a).

Cathexis. This term refers to a Freudian concept that proposed that individuals make psychological investments of energy in objects and people other than oneself (Reiner, 2012).

Collectivism. This term refers to a "flexible, variable self that emphasizes statuses, belonging and fitting in, and being in indirect communication" (Singelis, 1994, p. 581).

College readiness. This term refers to the knowledge and skills the student has acquired that will enable him/her to enroll and be successful in a postsecondary institution without requiring academic remediation (ACT, 2012). The ACT (2013) defined college readiness benchmarks for high school students to be "four years of English, and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies" (p.6).

College success coach. This person is a student advocate who monitors the student's progress, and implements individualized interventions to increase student success, both in and out of the school environment. The student advocate is referred to as a College Success Coach (CSC) within the Florida Mentoring and Scholarship Program (FMSP).

Collegiate stress. This term refers to a student's sense of pressure, and feelings of sacrifice and distress (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Degree commitment. This term refers to a student's perception of certainty and support in his/her degree completion (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Educational attainment. This term represents the level of education completed, i.e., a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or a doctoral degree (Kena et al., 2014).

High school academic rigor. This term refers to any high school course defined as honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, or any other advanced academic course that is designed to prepare a student for postsecondary educational success (ACT, 2012).

Human capital. This term refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that increase an individual's potential for academic, professional, or personal success through investment in education or training resulting in an improvement in productivity (Johnson, 2005).

Financial strain. This term refers to a student's concern over financial worries and a perception of a disadvantage in relationship to others (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

First-generation college student. This is a term coined by Fuji Adachi (Billison & Terry, 1982) that describes a student who is the first child in his/her family to attend college.

Florida Mentoring and Scholarship Program. This program is a dropout prevention, poverty reduction scholarship and mentoring program, which will now be referred to as the Florida Mentoring and Scholarship Program (FMSP).

Formal education. This term is defined by FMSP as any postsecondary Florida school that accepts Florida prepaid tuition and grants degrees or certification (TSIC, 2014).

Individualism. According to Singelis (1994), this term refers to a "bonded, unitary, and stable self that is separate from social context" (p. 581).

Institutional commitment. This term refers to a student's loyalty and confidence in his/her school choice along with the intent to re-enroll (Beck & Davidson, 2013; Beck & Milligan, 2014).

Learning communities. This term refers to a "variety of curricular approaches that intentionally link or cluster two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll a common cohort of students" (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2005, p. 67).

Mentoring. This term refers to external organizational support provided to program participants that provides emotional and academic support and guidance facilitated by a trained volunteer role model (TSIC, 2012a, 2013, 2014).

Persistence. This term refers to the student actively continuing towards the completion of an educational goal. FMSP identifies a student as nonpersisting after three consecutive semesters of not enrolling in at least one college course (A. Taylor, personal communication, January 16, 2015).

Remedial classes. This term refers to courses designed for students who lack the skills needed to perform college-level work reflective of the requirements of the postsecondary institution (Parsad & Lewis, 2003; Sparks & Malkus, 2013).

Resiliency. This term refers to a student's achievement of good outcomes in spite of serious stressors or barriers to success (Meichenbaum, 2005).

Retention. This term refers to a student staying in school until his/her degree is completed (Hegedorn, 2005). This term often is used interchangeably with persistence.

Scholastic conscientiousness. This term refers to the student's ability to complete

academic requirements in a timely manner (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Self-efficacy. This term refers to a student's belief that he/she is capable of implementing and fulfilling the course of action required to identify and handle situations and to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1997).

Social capital. This term refers to a student's entire social network and reciprocal support system that these children accumulate through the development of positive relationships with caring adults (Castano, 2007).

Social integration. This term refers to a student's overall sense of belonging and similarity to others along with positive social involvement (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Background

One of the concerns of higher education and, arguably, society as a whole, is what factors are associated with a student's college success and persistence (Conner et al., 2013; Leppel, 2002). A renewed national interest in increasing the college graduation rates has emerged because society understands the need for an educated and trained workforce (Achieve, 2010). This initiative will require societal innovation and effort to include individuals who have been traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education environments (Pathways to College Network, 2011). Postsecondary education or training is becoming an essential factor associated with the economic wellbeing of society and the individual. According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), for an individual to achieve labor market success, postsecondary education is a requirement. The IHEP projects that over half of the new jobs created in the 21st century will require a postsecondary degree or training (Institute for Higher Education Policy [IHEP], 2010).

Current and Historical Theories and Models of Student Retention

Current and historical research literature on retention offers multiple theories and models proposing explanations for a student not completing postsecondary education or training. However, Tinto's (1975) Theory of Social Integration and Astin's (1983) Theory of Student Involvement are considered to have provided the theoretical foundations for current retention research (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Given that the student attrition rate has remained at approximately 45% for the last century, these models continue to be relevant theories of student retention and persistence decisions

(Braxton, 2000). Although researchers have studied student attrition and persistence since the 1920s, Tinto (1975) was the first theorist to offer a theoretical framework incorporating psychological factors. Before Tinto's Model, theorists focused on student traits and behaviors. The following models have influenced current understanding of student attrition and persistence: the Sociological Model of the Dropout Process (Spady, 1970), the Social Integration Model (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2000), the Student Departure Model (Bean, 1980), the Development Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984), the General Causal Model (Pascarella, 1985), and the Integration Model of Student Persistence (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993).

Spady (1970) was the first researcher who developed a model positing factors associated with a student's decision to leave college. The Sociological Model of the Dropout Process examined five variables: academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development, and friendship support, which he proposed provided primary contributions to a student's social integration within the college environment. Spady's model of student attributes illustrates the impact of these positive variables on increased student persistence.

Bean (1980) built upon Spady's student attribute model, developing the Student Departure Model. He emphasized that student characteristics were a primary factor in student retention. Bean posited the background of an individual student needed to be considered to understand his/her interactions within the institutional environment and culture. Bean's model focused on the role of a student's psychological processes in student persistence.

Astin's (1984, 1985b, 1993) Developmental Theory of Student Involvement, discussed that student persistence or attrition is influenced not only by student attributes,

but also by environmental factors such as academic involvement, faculty interactions, and student-peer involvement. He proposed students benefit cognitively and affectively from actively investing in the college experience. Like Tinto, Astin combined a psychological concept, *cathexis,* with a learning theory concept. Cathexis is a Freudian concept that proposed that an individual makes psychological investments of energy in objects and people other than oneself (Reiner, 2012). By combining this Freudian notion with the learning theory concept of time on task, Astin (1999) developed a multidisciplinary theory stressing student responsibility, while emphasizing the college institution's responsibility to provide intellectual and social opportunities to the students.

As the Theory of Student Involvement evolved, Astin (1993) developed the I-E-O (input, environment, and outcomes) model as a method to study student development. According to Astin, input is the measure of an individual student's motivation and characteristics at the time of college admission. Environment refers to all aspects of the campus to which the student is exposed, such as faculty, programs, and policies. Outcome refers to the characteristics of the student after exposure to the institution's environment. Astin's model evaluates the impact of the college environment on an individual student's outcome, i.e., development and success.

Current researchers continue to model components of their research on Tinto's Social Integration Model (1975), as referenced by Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Hartley, 2011; Leppel, 2002; Milem and Berger, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; and Strauss and Volkwein, 2004. According to Guiffirida (2006), Tinto's Social Integration Model (1975, 1987, 1993) is widely regarded as the seminal work on postsecondary attrition or persistence decisions by students and has been described as reaching "paradigmatic stature" (Braxton & Lee, 2005, p. 108). Tinto's

research has evolved over time, providing colleges and universities with foundational guidelines for the development of effective college retention programs. Tinto was interested in understanding the factors associated with strengthening the student motivation needed to meet the academic requirements of college courses, while also developing a subjective perception of social belonging within the college milieu (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Hartley, 2011; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2003, 2005; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004).

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Tinto's model outlining the role of a student's academic and social integration has a strong empirical basis (Hartley, 2011). Tinto (1993) explained that his model focuses on the academic and social domains associated with a student's college experience. He posited that academic persistence is a complicated integration of the student's ability to integrate the two primary systems: academic and social. The academic domain refers to the overall classroom experience, including interactions with the faculty and ability to meet the academic requirements of the course, while the social domain refers to the quality of the social interactions the student has with his or her peers. Tinto (1993) stated that these two domains often overlap as a student may combine social and academic interactions, such as in a study group. He also discussed the prevalence of one domain over another at individual campuses. With that said, a combination of early institutional experiences, both academic and social, ultimately determines student persistence. Students who leave college early often feel academically and socially isolated. Tinto broadly modeled his college attrition theory after Durkheim's theory of suicide (1951). Durkheim looked at suicide as correlative with social causes, such as a lack of societal integration. Much in the same manner, student attrition is correlative with a lack of integration into the academic and

social milieu of the college (Hagedorn, 2005; Nordquist, 1993; Pescosolido & Georgianna, 1989; Reiner, 2012).

Van Gennep (1960) was also a significant influence on the development of Tinto's theory of integration. Tinto incorporated the three-stage process of separation, transition, and incorporation presented by Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites of Passage* as a foundation for his theory. Tinto (1975, 1993) proposed that postsecondary institutions are responsible for providing students the resources and support necessary to navigate these stages successfully. Stage one of this process is separation in which the student severs ties with childhood life and support system. Stage two is transition, as the student is beginning to develop the skill set needed to navigate his/her new environment successfully. Stage three is incorporation; it is during this stage that Tinto proposed that institutions could provide support and influence to the student.

It should be noted that over the years, some researchers have challenged Tinto's theory. For example, Nora (2001) argued that Tinto's separation stage during which the student severs all ties with his/her support system is in direct conflict with his own writings regarding disengagement, in which the student requires the continued support from family and community to navigate his proposed stages successfully. Nora suggested that perhaps Tinto did not expect a student to sever all ties literally, but rather to become open to new ideas and experiences. Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) noted Tinto's theory did not consider the role of external factors on student retention variables.

Building upon Tinto's work, Pascarella (1985) proposed the General Causal Model, where he incorporated the student attributes models of Spady (1970), Bean (1980), and the environmental model of Astin (1984) to develop a model that provided a holistic view of student persistence. Pascarella's model examined how a student's

background, and precollegiate attributes or traits influence the student's perception of the college experience, which then factors into a student's college persistence. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), empirical evidence supports a combination of student involvement in academic and social areas is related to a student's future academic persistence decisions.

Cabrera et al. (1993) combined Tinto's (1975) theory of Student Integration with Bean's (1980) theory of Student Attrition developing the Integration Model of Student Persistence that underscores the role of external factors in addition to social and academic integration on student persistence (Conner et al., 2013; Leppel, 2002, 2005; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Cabrera et al. (1993) noted that Tinto did not consider the role of external factors such as finances and parental support while formulating his Student Integration Model. Conversely, Bean's (1980) Student Attrition Model recognizes the role nonintellectual external factors such as family approval have on a student's postsecondary persistence decisions. Cabrera et al. (1993) posited that student persistence decisions could be better understood through combining these two major retention theories. Furthermore, by combining these models, college administrators could evaluate the predictive variables associated with postsecondary persistence, e.g., intent to persist; grade point average; institutional commitment; encouragement from friends and family; goal commitment; academic integration; and financial attitudes, and then determine the variables that are most predictive for his/her individual institution. Cabrera et al. (1993) concurred with Tinto's assertion that the variables associated with student persistence vary according to student composition, institutional type, and academic setting; therefore, it is important for individual organizations (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto (1993, 2006) and Seidman (2005) emphasized the role of student support

services, such as advising, academic counseling, and student tutoring as primary components of successful academic and social integration into college. Seidman (2005) proposed the following formula to increase academic retention: Retention equals Early Identification plus Early, Intensive, and Continuous Intervention, [RET = EID + (E + I + C)]. Bean (2005) and Seidman (2005) discussed the importance of using academic advisors, faculty, counselors, and tutors to establish relationships with at-risk students to increase academic integration.

Although Tinto's (1975) Theory of Social Integration and Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement continue to provide the basic theoretical framework for student retention and persistence, new research is emerging as to whether students value the current or future utility of education. Leppel (2002) noted many factors that influenced student persistence decisions. For example, number of hours worked, age, and marriage status had a negative impact on persistence for men and women, while family income, grade point average, and student involvement increased persistence (Conner et al., 2013). Leppel (2005) found that students who were more motivated by financial success were less likely to persist academically. The lack of persistence by these students was attributed to ill-suited majors, as students who are in majors that are matched to their talents and personality are likely to persist to graduation (Conner et al., 2013). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated, "The evidence consistently indicates that student involvement, both generally and in an array of specific academic and social areas or activities, is related in some fashion to intended or actual persistence into the next academic year" (p. 426).

Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) noted that the concept of student engagement is not new. Astin (1984, 1985b); Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991);

and Pace (1984) are credited with the development of student engagement theory. According to Pike and Kuh (2005a), while these researchers, Astin (1984, 1985b), Kuh et al. (1991), Kuh et al. (1989); and Pace (1984), used different terminology to describe student engagement, the basic concept was the same. The role of student engagement, the extent to which a student and the academic institution collaboratively engage influences academic success is as, or more important than, the college attended or individual characteristics (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Intuitional practices that support student engagement influence student success (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), while institutional practices that do not encourage student engagement result in decreased student achievement (Upcraft et al., 2005). The Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project evaluated the intentional student engagement practices of 20 different postsecondary institutions with varying degrees of size, selectivity, private or public, and age. The results of this study verified the influence of engagement on a student's academic and social postsecondary success (Kuh et al., 2011).

Gupton, Castelo-Rodriquez, Martinez, and Quintanar (2009) discussed the lack of social capital in an institution as a contributor to student attrition. These researchers encouraged the use of academic advisors, counselors, and tutors to increase at-risk students' perception of belonging, "validating a community of support" (Gupton et al., 2009, p. 250). Kuh et al. (2011) and Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) reported that the incorporation of student support programs encouraged persistence by providing a sense of belonging at the educational institution. Further, Heisserer and Parette (2002) suggested that an integrated approach to student support services was the most effective with at-risk students. The authors suggested integrating elements from the

prescriptive, *developmental*, and *intrusive* student advising models. For example, using the prescriptive advising model, the at-risk student receives specific academic instructions, such as class schedule, in combination with the developmental model, which encourages the student to utilize other campus resources independently, such as tutoring or learning labs. Finally, the inclusion of the intrusive method of advising involves regular contact with the student, as well as making direct recommendations. This approach is effective with this student population by increasing academic motivation and improving decision-making skills (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Educational Levels and Poverty

An individual's level of education obtainment is a strong predictor of poverty (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2011). In 2011, 46.2 million, or 15%, of individuals living in the United States were estimated to be living in households with incomes at or below the official poverty line of $23,051.00 for a family of four that consists of two adults and two children (Gabe, 2012). Although the percentage of people living in poverty has fluctuated over the last decade, the overall percentage of Americans living in poverty increased between the years 2000 and 2009 from 11% to 15% (Gabe, 2012; NCES, 2011). Many factors such as parental education, single parent household, and consistent parental employment contribute to adults, children, or families living in poverty (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013; Gabe, 2012).

In 2011, 86% of children under 18 years old living with a parent(s) who did not complete high school lived in a low-income home. Additionally, 70% of children who lived in single-parent households were considered to be poor (Addy et al., 2013). In 2011, 47.6% of children living in single-female-headed homes with no husband present were living below the federal poverty standards, compared to the 24.7% of single-male-parent

homes with no wife present. The number of children in poverty dropped to 10.9% in two-parent families (Gage, 2012). Among impoverished children living in single female-headed households, 54.2% of the African American children, 56.8% of the Hispanic children, and 35.5% of the nonHispanic Caucasian children were considered to be poor (Gage, 2012). A primary contributing factor to the disproportionate percentage of African American children living in poverty is the high incidence of African American children living in female-headed single parent homes. In 2011, approximately 55.8% of African American children lived in female-headed single parent homes, in comparison to the 30.1% of Hispanic children, and the 17% of the nonHispanic Caucasian children (Gage, 2012).

In a report produced for The National Center for Children in Poverty, Addy et al. (2013) stated that children comprise 24% of the population of the United States. However, they represent 34% of Americans living in poverty. Approximately 72% of the children in the United States are under the age of 18, and of this percentage, approximately 32.4 million, or 45%, live in households with income levels below $44,700.00. An additional 16.1 million, or 22%, live in households with incomes below the federal poverty rate of $22,350.00 for a family of four (Addy et al., 2013; Gabe, 2012). Although African American children represent a disproportionately high percentage of children living in poverty in comparison to the total percentage of African Americans living in the United States, nonHispanic Caucasian children represent the largest group of children living in poverty (Addy et al., 2013). In 2011, 31% of nonHispanic Caucasian children, or 12.1 million, lived in low-income families; 65%, or 6.5 million, African American children lived in low income families; 32%, or one million, of Asian children lived in low income families; and 65% of Hispanic children, or

11 million, lived with low income families (Addy et al., 2013).

The overall poverty rates in the United States demonstrated inconsistent fluctuations from 1980 through 2000. However, the overall poverty rate increased from 11 to 14% between 2000 and 2009 (NCES, 2011). Further, the number of young adults aged 15 to 24 living in poverty increased from 14 to 20% between 2000 and 2009. However, gender differences continue to be noted in poverty statistics between 2000 and 2009. The percentage of young men aged 15 to 24 living in poverty increased from 12 to 17%, while the percentage of young women aged 15 to 24 living in poverty increased from 16 to 22% (NCES, 2011).

Poverty rates of young adults aged 18 to 24 were correlative with their high school matriculation rates (NCES, 2011). Further, this correlation persists across gender, race, and ethnicity comparisons. For example, when examining the poverty rates of 18- to 24-year-old young men, 17.4% of young men with a high school diploma were living in poverty as compared to the 24.5% who did not graduate from high school. However, the poverty rates of young men aged 18 to 24 years old dropped to 14.0% after obtaining some postsecondary education or an associate's degree (NCES, 2011).

In 2009, 38.9% of 18- to 24-year-old young women who did not complete high school lived in poverty. This number is staggering, especially when 16.6% of young women living in poverty completed some college or obtained an associate's degree. The level of young women living in poverty was further reduced to 12.8% after the completion of a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2011).

When race and ethnicity comparisons are examined, the link between poverty and postsecondary education continues to be pronounced. For instance, 42.5% of the African American young adults aged 18 to 24 years old who do not complete high school were

reported to be living in poverty, in comparison to the 22.1% of African American young adults who have some college or an associate's degree. The role of education in poverty was also noted in Hispanic young adults aged 18 to 24 years old. Hispanic young adults who did not complete high school had a poverty percentage of 37.2%, in comparison to the 17.6% of those who had some college or an associate's degree. Although not as pronounced, 22.7 % of nonHispanic Caucasian young adults who did not complete high school were reported to be living in poverty, in comparison to 13.3% of young nonHispanic Caucasian adults aged 18 to 24 years old who were living in poverty (NCES, 2011).

Due to the strong correlation between an individual's level of educational attainment and poverty, researchers have calculated the annual and lifetime benefits to an individual and to society based on his/her level of educational attainment. For instance, on average, a single high school graduate benefits society over $200,000.00 through increased tax revenue and lower government spending. Further, if the United States could increase the high school graduation rates by 50%, the country could potentially realize $45 billion in increased government revenue and savings (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a).

Despite the numerous obstacles and barriers, approximately 60 % of low-income young adults have earned or are attending a postsecondary institution. Although this statistic is encouraging, it might be misleading, because it combines the three categories of degree-attempting low-income young adults (IHEP, 2010). The first category is the low-income young adults currently enrolled or attending a postsecondary institution. The next category is the low-income young adults who had enrolled or attempted postsecondary education at some point but who dropped out or have not continued, and

the final category is the low-income young adults who had received a postsecondary degree or certification but continued to be classified as low income or poor (IHEP, 2010).

Economic Benefits of Postsecondary Education

Currently, when compared to other developed countries, the United States ranks twenty-first in high school graduation rates, and fifteenth in the college attainment levels for individuals aged 25 to 34 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b). According to Carnevale (2008) and Carnevale et al. (2010), between a half and two-thirds of the future jobs will require some type of postsecondary education, training, or certification. Additionally, many of these jobs will require a bachelor's degree or higher. Unfortunately, unless there is a significant increase in high school and postsecondary completion rates, the United States is projected to have approximately three million fewer bachelor degrees than needed to meet the labor force demands by 2018 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b).

Using an economic input model that analyzes state economic indicators developed by Economic Modeling Specialist, Inc. (EMSI) and based upon the current economic data including information obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Alliance for Excellent Education published the economic impact of educational attainment at the state and national level (Amos, 2013). The economic benefits to society of an educated populace are significant (Amos, 2013). Using EMSI's economic forecasting model, the Alliance of Excellent Education (2011a) projected if the 90,500 high school dropouts in Florida from the Class of 2010 had graduated, the Florida economy would note $322 million in increased earnings due to an increase in individual earnings, $254 million in increased spending, 2750 new jobs, $23 million in increased state tax revenue, $672 million in increased home sales, and $42 million in increased

automobile sales (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a). High school graduation rates across the country are improving; the Florida high school graduation rate increased 6.5% from 2011 to 2012 (Amos, 2013). According to EMSI's economic model, the projected economic benefits from these 14,100 high school graduates would result in a 2.9 billion dollar increase in lifetime earnings, which would result in an increase of 7.5 million dollars in state and local tax revenues (Amos, 2013).

Presently, only 27% of high school graduates in the state of Florida earn a postsecondary certificate or degree, but based upon EMSI's economic model, if 60% of young adults earned a college degree or credential, the societal benefits would be noticeable. Currently, 14% of high school graduates in Florida are projected to earn a vocational certification, 10% of the students are projected to earn an associate's degree, and 3% are projected to earn a bachelor's degree. If Florida could increase projected postsecondary education rates of vocational certification from 14% to 30%, associate degrees from 10% to 23% and bachelor's degree from 3% to 7%, the residents of Florida would note a $536 million increase in earnings (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b). This increase would benefit the residents of Florida from the creation of 4,600 new jobs, and $39 million in increased tax revenue (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b).

A young adult's economic potential would be substantial if he/she increased his/her *educational attainment* (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b, Amos, 2013). Kena et al. (2014) defined educational attainment as representing the level of education completed, i.e., a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, a bachelor's degree, master's degree, or a doctoral degree. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the educational attainment rates among 25 to 29 year olds increased between

1990 and 2013. The percentage of 25 to 29 year olds who had graduated from high school or received its equivalent increased from 86 to 90%. The highest percentage of change, which was 3%, occurred between 2003 and 2013. Moreover, the percentage of 25 to 29 year olds who had completed a bachelor's or higher degree increased from 23 to 34%. In 2013, some 7% of 25 to 29 year olds had completed a master's degree or higher (Kena et al., 2014).

Increased earning potential. Currently, young adults are dropping out of high school at the rate of approximately 7,000 students per school day. The negative impact this dropout rate has on the country's economy is significant. For example, if the young adults who dropped out of high school in 2011 had graduated, their increased earning potential would have generated approximately $154 billion into the country's economy over the course of their lives (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a). Furthermore, high school dropouts earn approximately $19,540 annually in comparison to the $27,380 earned by high school graduates, the $36,190 earned by individuals with an associate's degree, or the $46,930 earned by individuals with a bachelor's degree (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a).

There are many economic benefits to society associated with helping students to not only graduate from high school, but also to matriculate to postsecondary education or vocational training. Although the societal benefits from high school completion are well documented, the economic stimulus associated with postsecondary education or training is even greater. High school graduates earn higher wages; pay higher local, state, and federal taxes; live longer; are less likely to have children as adolescents; commit fewer crimes; and are less likely to participate in government assistance programs. Furthermore, high school graduates demonstrate increased levels of civic participation, as well as

volunteer more of their time to the community (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b).

A National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) report tracked the earning of individuals between the years 1980 and 2005, noting that individual income increased with increased education for each year tracked. The U.S. Census Bureau also reported an individual with a college degree in the 25-to-34 age bracket who works full-time, earns approximately 46 % more than a similar individual who did not complete his or her degree (De Alva & Schneider, 2011). High school and postsecondary education is a positive investment for an individual and society at large (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a, 2011b; Florida Center for Fiscal & Economic Policy [FCFEP], 2010).

Employment opportunities. Low educational attainment not only negatively affects an individual's earning potential, but also employment opportunities during economic downturns. The economic recession that started in 2007 increased the average national unemployment rate from approximately 5% to 9%. However, there was a significant difference in the unemployment rates for an individual when educational attainment was compared. For example, in August 2011, four years after the official start of the recession, 14.3% of high school dropouts were unemployed in comparison to the 9.6% of high school graduates. Conversely, the unemployment rates of individuals with some college education or an associate's degree was 8.2%, but only 4.3% of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher were unemployed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b). Because of this recession, and the subsequent increase in unemployment, the poverty rates have increased.

Since 2007, as a result of the 18-month recession, 48 states including Florida have experienced statistically significant increases in the number of individuals living in poverty. No states have shown a poverty rate statistically lower than its prerecession rate.

However, Michigan had statistically significant increases in poverty between 2007-2011, and California, Florida, and Indiana had significant increases in poverty between 2008-2011 (Gage, 2012). Florida could reduce the number of its citizens living in poverty and stimulate the economy by focusing on increasing high school graduation rates, as well as encouraging these high school graduates to obtain postsecondary degrees or training. Florida residents who dropped out of high school are five times more likely to live in poverty than a college graduate is (FCFEP, 2010; Fiester, 2010, 2013). Postsecondary education is rapidly becoming a fundamental requirement for maintaining economic stability (FCFEP, 2010; Fiester, 2010, 2013).

Economic stability. Isreal, Beaulieu, and Hartless (2001) reported economic stability could be linked to three primary factors: (a) an ability to competitively participate in a global economy, (b) an ability to effectively assimilate information technology, and (c) the development of a trained and educated labor pool. Additional researchers suggested income inequality as a primary barrier to the accumulation of human capital (Caucutt & Lochner, 2006, 2011; Mejia & St-Pierre, 2007). Economically deprived individuals do not have the means to finance human capital investment; consequently, they do not financially invest in postsecondary education or training. The mistaken perception that the human capital investment has limited future economic impact also negatively influences the individual's postsecondary education decisions (Cote, Skinkle, & Motte, 2008; Usher, 2005). It must be noted that certain factors in an individual's education decision are not purchasable or are beyond individual control in relationship to human capital investment decisions, such as "family background, parental education, socioeconomic characteristics, race, genes, culture, provision of social connections, installation of preferences and aspirations in children, etc." (Mejia & St-

Pierre, 2007, p. 2).

Parental Economic Resources and Academic Persistence

Researchers continue to debate the role of parental economic resources in relationship to an individual's educational attainment. Some researchers support the liquidity constraint hypothesis that posits low-income children are hindered from educational attainment due to parental inability to finance a college education (Akresh, Bagby, de Walque, & Kazianga, 2010; Caucutt & Lochner, 2006, 2011). However, other researchers minimized the liquidity constraint hypothesis, instead attributing child development and college readiness as the primary reasons for the gaps in educational attainment between low- and high-income children (Isreal, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001; Nam & Huang, 2009, 2011).

In a recent study, Nam and Huang (2011) explored the role of parental liquid and fixed assets on their human capital decisions in relationship to their children's education. As expected, the researchers concluded that parental assets, especially liquid assets, were positively correlated with a child's educational attainment. High levels of parental liquid assets increased educational attainment in high school graduation and college attendance. However, the researchers noted an interesting finding: negative assets had different impacts on educational attainment depending on the child's stage of education. Nam and Huang (2011) found that negative parental assets increased high school graduation, but decreased college graduation. The researchers suggested that parental inability to borrow monies to finance continuing education plays a significant role in education attainment. Although the study was not without limitations, such as the role of cognitive skills and parental attitudes towards investment in a child's education, after controlling for the cognitive skill indicators, the study still had two significant measures: parental income

and liquid assets. Nam and Huang (2011) concluded parental assets had a positive relationship with a student's educational attainment.

While not commonly recognized, an individual's human capital investment decisions are made early in life (Song & Jones, 2006). Third grade academic performance seems to be a critical indicator of long-term academic success. Third grade appears to be the pivotal year in which children and parents make a decision in regards to the long-term capital investment in education (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). In their seminal research, Rosenzweig and Schultz (1982) reported parental perceptions of academic ability influenced the decision to make human capital investments in individual children. Akresh et al. (2010) confirmed Rosenzweig and Schultz's (1982) research that given financial restrictions, parents' human capital investment decision is based upon their perception of the academic talent of the child. Parental income and borrowing constraints also influence human capital investments in education (Caucutt & Lochner, 2011; Nam & Huang, 2009, 2011). Researchers are also studying the role of early parental income in regards to long-term academic achievement and human capital investment (Akresh et al., 2010; Caucutt & Lochner, 2006, 2011). While student loan programs are available for postsecondary education, there is limited support for human capital investments in preschool children. Although elementary and secondary education is publically available, the quality of the education is uneven, especially when compared to high quality private education (Caucutt & Lochner, 2011).

Developmentally, children in middle childhood are learning to read until the third grade. However, this construct changes when a student enters the fourth grade, at which time the child is reading to learn (Hernandez, 2011; Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynne, 2010). Lesnick et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to determine the

relationship, if any, between 26,000 students' third grade reading level and their educational outcome. A student's third grade reading level was demonstrated to be a significant predictor of his/her educational outcome (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Stanovich, 1986). The study reported 80% of students who were reading above grade level in the third grade graduated from high school, compared to the 60% of students who were reading at grade level, and the 45% of the students who were reading below grade level in the third grade (Lesnick et al., 2010). A student's third grade reading level was also predictive of his/her postsecondary educational attainment. Lesnick et al. (2010) noted nearly 80% of students reading above grade level in third grade graduated high school, and 75% of these students attended college. Comparatively, only 45% of students reading below grade level in the third grade graduated high school, and less than 20% of these attended college (Lesnick et al., 2010). The societal cost of an individual who does not graduate high school is estimated to be $260,000 in lost earnings, productivity, and taxes (Fiester, 2010). In 2010, there were 7.9 million low-income children in the United States, birth through eight. In 2009, 68% of fourth grade students read below grade level (Fiester, 2010). Current projections estimate that 83%, or 6.6 million have increased chances of dropping out of high school because he/she cannot read at grade level by the fourth grade.

Using multilevel regressive models, as well as controlling for covariates, Lesnick et al. (2010) noted that a student's third grade reading level was a strong predictor of eighth-grade reading level. In this study, 40% of students who were reading below grade level in the third grade continued to read below grade level in the eighth grade, which in turn directly correlated with ninth grade academic performance. Moreover, after controlling for covariates, such as demographic characteristics and eighth-grade reading

scores, Lesnick et al. (2010) found that ninth grade academic performance was more predictive of high school graduation and college enrollment rates for students who were reading at or below grade level in the third grade. Conversely, reading above grade level in the third grade was a strong predictor of college attendance even after accounting for demographics, eighth-grade reading level, and ninth-grade academic success (Lesnick et al., 2010).

Additional research has confirmed the link between third grade reading proficiency, high school graduation rates, and poverty (Fiester, 2013). McNamara, Scissors, and Gutknecht (2010) reported that students who performed poorly in reading kindergarten through the third grade continued to demonstrate a decline in academic performance in comparison to his/her peers who read at or above grade level (Fiester, 2013). Hernandez (2011) analyzed the data of 4,000 students noting that 23% of children who did not read at grade level in the third grade did not graduate in comparison to the 9% of students reading on grade level, and the 4% of above average readers. Students "with the lowest reading scores account for a third of students but for more that than three-fifths (63%) of all children who do not graduate from high school" (Hernandez, 2011, p. 6).

Factors Influencing Individual Human and Social Capital Investment

It is difficult to determine all of the variables that are attributable to the individual decision-making process regarding human capital investment. Therefore, it is important to examine other influences on human capital investment choices. For example, using the number of years of education as a variable, although remembering it is rare for individuals to obtain more than sixteen years of education; adults who complete fewer years of education demonstrate the highest degree of human capital inequity (Mejia & St-

Pierre, 2007).

Researchers have amassed a significant body of literature in an attempt to understand parental decisions regarding human capital investment in their children (Akresh et al., 2010; Caucutt & Lochner, 2006, 2011; Hickman et al., 2008). Hickman et al. (2008) noted the primary structure of the family could positively influence a child's willingness to invest in his/her future. Factors influencing the individual's long-term decisions regarding personal human capital investment and academic persistence include the presence of one or both parents in the home, the number of siblings, parental nurturing, homework monitoring, television restriction, and parental aspirations for the children (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). On the other hand, Caucutt and Lochner (2011) proposed parental income and the parent's borrowing ability might provide additional insight into an individual's educational attainment, contending human capital investment is a multigenerational process that begins early in life. Carneiro and Heckman (2002) and Caucutt and Lochner (2006, 2011) contended that early parental income is a significant factor in their child's educational attainment. These researchers explained that although children can obtain a public elementary and secondary education, the quality of the education might be inadequate in comparison to a private school education and preschool programs. Additionally, Caucutt and Lochner (2011) noted the significance of parental perceptions of a child's academic ability as influencing decisions to make financial investments in education. Understanding the role and importance of parental support in educational attainment, FMSP has mandated parental involvement in the scholarship and mentoring process (TSIC, 2007, 2011, 2012a, 2013, 2014).

Factors That Influence School Financial Investment

Interrelationships between school financial investments and complementary

factors on the educational outcomes were first examined in the landmark Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966). Since then, many studies, including Cote, Skinkle, and Motte (2008); Williams and Swail (2005); and Usher (2005), using different data sets have determined that nonpurchasable complementary factors have a first order impact on educational success. Family characteristics, i.e., ethnic background, parental education, geographic location, and family composition, were the primary determinants of student success or failure, not school characteristics, a finding that has been replicated in multiple research studies (Ginther, Haveman, & Wolfe, 2000; Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007; Robertson & Reynolds, 2010). A review of the literature suggested the barriers to human capital investment and educational attainment have remained consistent over the last 50 years. Groger (1997) examined the GPA of 5,000 University of California San Diego undergraduates noting that personal background and demographic characteristics were the primary influencing factors. Groger (1997) also found that local violence had an effect on the likelihood of high school graduation. A similar study of 18,000 students, Goldhaber and Brewer (1997) found that parental educational attainment and family income positively increased test scores (Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007).

With those studies in mind, social capital theory seems to provide a more adequate explanation regarding the willingness of individuals to pursue personal human capital investment. *Social capital* refers to "a whole social network and associated reciprocity norms that allow collective action" (Castano, 2007, p. 140). This definition permits researchers to explore the nonmaterial resources that are available to individuals because of intra and extrafamilial relationships (Pettit & Collins, 2011). Positive relationship interaction increases the level of trust within an individual's social network, promoting the development of inter and intrarelational trust feelings and reciprocity

among the members (Castano, 2007; Coleman, 1988; Pettit & Collins, 2011). This increase in trust is correlated with a rise in social capital. Increasing an individual's trust situation allows an individual to make human capital expenditures and facilitates an individual's assimilation of technology; all factors that support individual and societal economic growth and productivity (Castano, 2007; Pettit & Collins, 2011).

Over the course of their lifetimes, individuals must also factor into their decision-making process the impact that technology advances have on human capital investments. Postsecondary education and technological training focus on the development of different skill sets. Postsecondary education produces differing levels of generalized and/or specific skills, while technological training focuses on the accumulation of a job specific skill set (Song & Jones, 2006). An individual's human capital investment decision is compounded by personal preferences regarding leisure and consumption, labor demands, and potential earning projections. An individual accumulates human capital by formal education and training, in essence, deferring current wages for future wages, or through informal training and on-the-job training (Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007; Song & Jones, 2006). Depreciation of human capital occurs through the aging process and obsolescence due to technological progress. General education enhances human capital, while training is a specific job skill. Hence, each method develops different accumulation and depreciation patterns. At a certain age, individuals must choose between work, education, or training, which in turn, leads to leisure and consumption choices (Mejfa & St-Pierre, 2007; Song & Jones, 2006).

Resiliency and Academic Persistence

One of the factors associated with academic persistence is *resilience*, which can be defined as the achievement of good outcomes in spite of serious stressors or barriers to

success (Meichenbaum, 2005). Resilience is associated with an individual's ability to adapt and thrive while experiencing significant life adversities (Masten & Reed, 2002; Meichenbaum, 2005). Researchers have studied why some children exhibit the resilience to succeed in spite of environmental circumstances and other children do not. A positive temperament or an easygoing disposition appears to be a primary characteristic of resilient children (Masten & Reed, 2002; Meichenbaum, 2005).

Kim-Cohen, Moffit, Caspi, and Taylor (2004) suggested resilience might have a genetic influence based upon their study of monozygotic (MZ), or identical twins and dizygotic (DZ), or fraternal twins, who had experienced socioeconomic deprivation. Statistically, the research results indicated a 71% genetic influence in resilience as the MZ twins demonstrated a higher level of resilience than DZ twins did (r = .72 MZ versus .26 DZ twins). Other characteristics of resilient children include good problem solving skills, social competence, individual autonomy, a sense of purpose, a sense of optimism, as well as a history of academic and social success (Masten & Reed, 2002; Meichenbaum, 2005). According to Meichenbaum (2005), approximately one-half to two-thirds of children who have been exposed to high-risk situations grow up to lead successful lives.

Meichenbaum (2005) posited that resiliency contributed to high-risk individual's ability to overcome environmental, financial, social, or physical barriers. To illustrate this construct, The Horatio Alger Association Scholarship Program has initiated the Success study to understand resilience better (Wolniak, Rude, Gebhardt, & Hoffer, 2011). The purpose of this study was to determine the factors associated with the scholarship recipients' ability to overcome adverse environmental, financial, social, and physical barriers to achieve college success and opportunities ultimately. This study compared the

Horatio Alger Association applicants to national high school populations. Although past research has indicated the role of resiliency in educational achievement, there is limited research on the role of resiliency in at-risk students, specifically the college-going student population. Researchers hope this study will begin to provide a base for understanding the role of resiliency, personal attributes, and motivation in academic and life success (Wolniak et al., 2011). Phase One of the Horatio Alger Success Study noted that the scholarship recipients remained motivated in spite of experiencing disadvantaged backgrounds. These students overcame adversarial environments without succumbing to external adversity or pressure. Instead, these students were active in their community, more involved in extracurricular activities, received higher ACT or SAT scores, and were employed during high school (Wolniak et al., 2011).

Wolniak et al. (2011) have identified three types of resiliency in the scholarship recipients. Type 1 Resiliency was characterized by the student's effort to mitigate the adverse experience on his/her life. Financial hardship was the most commonly noted adversity in this group. Most of the scholarship recipients dealt with this type of hardship by independently seeking a part-time job and financial education. Students who were determined to change their life circumstances in the future characterized Type 2 Resiliency (Wolniak et al., 2011). This scholarship recipient displayed a capacity for delayed gratification, i.e., he/she was willing to work hard in the present, while understanding that achieving his/her goal would not occur for many years in the future. Further, he/she was able to articulate his/her goals clearly, finding positive ways to facilitate the achievement of these goals such as developing a mentoring relationship. The scholarship recipients who were categorized as displaying Type 3 Resiliency cognitively reframed their individual adversity as barriers or obstacles that they had overcome. This

type of resiliency is optimistic in nature, as the scholarship recipients focused on the life lessons and strength they gained from the experience (Wolniak et al., 2011).

A multifaceted interplay between adversity and opportunities continues to be noted in educational success. Program scholarship recipients who displayed moderate to high levels of resiliency overcame adversity to achieve higher levels of academic and life success in comparison to the less resilient students who were vulnerable to the external adversities that interfered in their academic success (Wolniak et al., 2011). These students were able to combine the qualities of delayed gratification, while remaining motivated and goal oriented. Given that all students are categorized based upon many factors and individual characteristics, it is not surprising that an individual's ability to remain resilient is an important component in predicting academic success and perseverance in high-risk students who have experienced adversity (Wolniak et al., 2011).

First-Generation Students

First-generation college students are considered to be an academically at-risk population by many retention theorists in regards to perseverance and degree attainment (Pike & Kuh, 2005b; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Some theorists attribute lower academic and social integration as a primary factor influencing the perseverance decisions of first-generation college students (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002; Pittman & Richman, 2007). *First-generation college student*, a term coined by Fuji Adachi (Billison & Terry, 1982), describes a student who is the first child in his/her family to attend college. Researchers defined first-generation college students in multiple ways. For example, some researchers defined first-generation students as being students whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007),

although other researchers categorize the first-generation college student based upon the fact that neither of his/her parents attended or attained a college degree, meaning that a first-generation college student's parent has a high school diploma or less (Billison & Terry, 1982; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brian, 2006). One of the strongest predictors of positive persistence decisions by college students is the educational attainment level of the student's parents (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Rouse (2004) noted that the father's educational level had a more significant influence on the postsecondary choice of an individual than the mother's educational level. Klepfer and Hull (2012) replicated these findings, reporting that the data indicated that paternal educational attainment had more influence than maternal educational attainment, when compared to the other evaluated factors contributing to persistence. The researchers found that if a father had a high school degree, the student's persistence rate was 83%, and if the father had a 4-year college degree or greater, the persistence rate increased to 94% in 4-year institutions. This same trend was noted in two-year institutions with a 61% to 71% reported respectively. This is not to say that maternal educational attainment was not a factor. Students whose mother graduated high school had a 85% persistence rate, which increased to 93% if the mother had a 4-year college degree or higher when attending a 4-year institution. This trend was also noted at the two-year institution, with a 12-point gap reported. Neither study offered an explanation of the gender difference, rather suggesting that perhaps parental postsecondary education increased positive communication (Klepfer & Hull, 2012). Additionally, low parental education increased the attrition rates of a college student (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009).

Although there is an increase in the number of first-generation students enrolling

in college, this population demonstrates lower persistence rates than second-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005b). Characteristics of first-generation college students differ from second-generation college students in relationship to college enrollment and persistence decisions. To begin with, prospective first-generation college students are less likely to either apply or enroll in college (Barry, Hudley, Kelly, & Cho, 2009; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fisher, 2003; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). If a first-generation student enrolls in college, he/she not only is less academically successful, but also is less likely to persist to degree attainment (Barry et al., 2009; Ishitani, 2003, 2006; Reome, 2012). Moreover, like low-income students, first-generation students report perceptions of isolation and marginalization, especially during their first year of college. These negative perceptions influence the long-term persistence decisions of first-generation students (Jehangir, 2009).

First-generation status appears to present a disadvantage in relationship to postsecondary persistence and decisions, as well as degree attainment, independent of additional enrollment and individual background factors (Choy, 2001). In addition, first-generation college students have lower postsecondary educational expectations or aspirations, peer involvement, or engagement in comparison to their second-generation counterparts (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Olive, 2008). Other factors that might influence the persistence decisions of first-generation college students are lower levels of parental encouragement to attend college, the need for the student to work while attending college, and a perception of faculty disinterest in his/her academic success (Barry et al., 2009). Consequently, first-generation college students tend to be less academically prepared, study less, work more, and have lower grade point averages, entrance exam scores, and poorer self-images than their counterparts (Bui, 2002;

Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008).

However, Reome (2012) identified five themes that were associated with increased persistence and retention decisions of first-generation college students. Although parental support is important in persistence decisions, maternal support and encouragement is more influential in persistence decisions than paternal support or support from other family members (Reome, 2012). Individual aspirations and motivation to earn a college degree and the student's academic preparedness were also identified as important characteristics in persistence decisions. Positive perceptions of self-confidence and self-worth also contributed to a first-generation student's persistence decisions. Finally, the ability to fund educational decisions played a fundamental role in the persistence decisions of first-generation college students (Reome, 2012). According to Olive (2008), administrators would benefit from a better understanding of the role and influence of family and parents on postsecondary matriculation choices.

College Preparedness and Academic Persistence

Educators are increasingly concerned over the lack of college readiness of students entering colleges or universities. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2010), 60% of high school graduates are not prepared for postsecondary education. Data collected by the National High School Center indicated that 93% of middle school students report a goal of college attendance (Amelga, 2012). Yet, only 44% of these students enroll in college, and only 26% graduate from college within six years (Conley & McGaughy, 2012). This gap is especially evident in at-risk students who have been identified as unprepared for college courses due to deficits in effective life skills combined with familial risk factors (Barry et al., 2009). Many of these students have limited family support and/or encouragement to continue in postsecondary

education (Barry et al., 2009). Craig (2005) reported that poor academic preparedness combined with low goal commitment also affects student success.

High school students often overestimate their academic preparedness, or *college readiness* (ACT, 2012; Amelga, 2012; Tritelli, 2003). The ACT (2012) has defined "college and career readiness as the acquisition of knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing first-year college courses at a postsecondary institution without the need for remediation" (p. 2). However, there is a significant disparity between a student's stated goal to attend college and his/her ability to perform college level work. Consequently, many of the students who enroll in college do not complete their postsecondary training. Further, there is growing concern among high school teachers that graduating seniors are inadequately prepared for college-level course work (Amelga, 2012). This concern was confirmed by the 2012, 2013, and 2014 ACT data, which indicated that only 25% in 2012, and 26% in 2013 and 2014 of the test takers demonstrated a preparedness for college level work in all four subject areas (ACT, 2012, 2013, 2014). Although, the number of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions has increased, the students did not meet basic college readiness indicators (ACT, 2012, 2013, 2014; Amos, 2013).

A lack of college readiness contributes to a student not completing postsecondary education. Many students discover after acceptance into a postsecondary institution that they must take remedial English or mathematics courses, which do not earn credits towards college graduation (Amelga, 2012). Remedial courses refer to courses designed for students who lack the skills needed to perform college-level work reflective of the requirements of the postsecondary institution (Parsad & Lewis, 2003; Sparks & Malkus, 2013). Remedial courses alone are not designed to provide students with the appropriate

skill set needed to succeed in a traditional college class situation. Early retention theorists suggested that the purpose of remedial education is to teach the student learning strategies that will result in success in his/her academic, career, and life goals (Bean, 1980; Kuh et al., 2011; Love, 2012; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 2006). Currently, there is not a standardized measure of college readiness (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). However, one measure is using enrollment in postsecondary remedial courses. Fifty-two percent of new freshmen at community colleges, and 20% of new freshmen at traditional colleges and universities need academic remediation. The financial costs to provide academic remediation to unprepared college students is estimated to be $3 billion annually (Complete College America, 2012). The ACT (2013) defined the college readiness benchmarks for high school students to be "four years of English, and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies" (p. 6).

The college readiness gap of the incoming students varies depending on the type of postsecondary institution in which the student enrolls. Highly selective institutions require a high school diploma, college-prep curriculum, a high grade point average, high scores on college admissions exams, and a history of extra-curricular involvement; consequently, there is only a 10% readiness gap (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education [NCPPHP], 2010). The college readiness gap increases to 30% in the less selective institutions, who still have admission criteria, but the requirements are less stringent than a highly selective institution (NCPPHP, 2010). However, the college readiness gap is significantly larger in the two other sectors of public institutions that enroll 80 to 90% of all undergraduates in public postsecondary education. These postsecondary educational institutions are considered to be open access, requiring only a high school diploma; the college readiness gap increased to 60% in nonselective state

colleges, and to 75% in two-year or community colleges (NCPPHE, 2010). The actual academic remediation statistics are difficult to measure due to the lack of college readiness standards at the state and institutional level. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2010) estimated up to 60% of incoming college freshmen will require academic remediation. A student's lack of college readiness is a huge obstacle to academic persistence as well as a financial drain to the student, his/her family, and society as a whole (Amelga, 2012; NCPPHE, 2010; Tritelli, 2003).

Learning Communities and Academic Persistence Decisions

Many colleges are developing strategies and creating programs designed to increase the retention and persistence rates of at-risk students. Using the seminal research of Tinto (1987) and Tinto et al. (1996), many higher education institutions are creating learning communities. Astin (1985a) stated

> Learning communities can be organized along curricular lines, common career interests, vocational interests, residential living area, and so on. These can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness, and uniqueness; to encourage continuity and the integration of diverse curricular and circular experiences; and to counteract the isolation that many students feel. (p. 161)

Hotchkiss, Moore, and Pitts (2006) researched the effects of participation in Freshmen Learning Communities (FLC) on academic retention and performance of 7,249 incoming freshmen that were participating in 32 Freshmen Learning Communities in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. The researchers chose to analyze the data collected from the African American (28%) and Caucasian (47%) students, using a standard treatment effects model, and controlling for selection bias. A regression analysis of the participant's high school GPA, SAT scores, college hours completed, age, race, gender, and student's major. The researchers reported that students who belonged to a Freshmen Learning Community demonstrated a .78 average increase in his/her GPA. African American male students

seemed to benefit the most from participation in the Freshmen Learning Communities, achieving approximately a one-letter grade improvement, while white female students demonstrated an insignificant academic gain. The researchers also found that participation in Freshmen Learning Communities increased the retention of African American males (31%) and females (19%), while showing no significant impact on Caucasian students (Hotchkiss et al., 2006). The purpose of learning communities is to provide a collaborative environment that fosters the accumulation of knowledge, skill development and sharing, and teaching students how to learn (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Mentoring and Academic Persistence Decisions

Rhodes and DuBois (2004) reported that effectively mentored youth demonstrate an improvement in achievement and higher academic aspirations, coupled with students being more likely to return to school the following year. While many factors influence success, the impact of a positive emotional relationship with a nurturing adult is paramount (Rhodes & DuBois, 2004). Although positive parental support and influence is the most optimal, that is not always an option. Understanding that adult mentors have the opportunity to play a significant role in fostering a child's resilience, FMSP has designed their program model to pair adult mentors with at-risk students, in a formal or informal setting, to offer emotional support, and act as an advocate for the student in the home or school environment (Masten & Reed, 2002; Meichenbaum, 2005; Shore, 1995).

The positive impact of the mentoring relationship is well documented by many researchers (Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005), yet there continues to be a lack of longitudinal studies or rigorous program evaluations regarding the efficacy or cost effectiveness of youth mentoring programs. Approximately three million youth are currently involved in formal mentoring programs across the

United States (Rhodes & DuBois, 2004). According to Grise et al. (2007), mentors have the ability to make life-changing differences for mentees when the mentors demonstrate genuine commitment and involvement with their mentees. The social capital that these children accumulate through the development of positive relationships with caring adults facilitates the development of personal, social, and leadership skills. Mentoring allows students to learn effective life strategies, providing children with the internal tools necessary to develop into competent and capable adults (Jekielek et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2005).

DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 73 independent evaluations of youth mentoring providing services to children and adolescents between 1999 and 2010. The researchers concluded that mentoring programs are an effective intervention strategy for children and adolescents. Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, and Grossman (2005) noted a positive impact on not only the student, but also the mentor him/herself. Effectively mentored youth demonstrate an improvement in parental relationships, academic achievement, behavior, and demonstrate higher aspirations. Mentored students are also more likely to return to school the following year. However, Grossman and Rhodes (2002); Rhodes and DuBois (2004); Rhodes et al. (2005) cautioned that effective mentoring relationships are a minimum of one year. Not surprisingly, the positive impact of these relationships accrues over time, with the best results noted in multiyear relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Mentoring, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2005).

Students in mentoring relationships lasting less than six months demonstrate significantly less enduring positive benefits (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2005). Herrera, Sipe, McClanahan, Arbreton, and Pepper

(2000) noted

> At the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond that forms between the youth and mentor. If the bond does not form, then youth and mentors may disengage from the match before the mentoring relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact. (p. 28)

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that mentoring relationships lasting under three months may actually harm the students. The negative effects of a short-term mentoring relationship might be especially evident in children who have previously experienced negative adult relationships (Jekielek et al., 2002). Children generally perceive adult-mentoring relationships to be caring (Mentoring, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2005). Therefore, if a misunderstanding or difficulty develops in the mentoring relationship, there is a potential to overshadow the positive long-term effects of mentoring (Mentoring, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004; Rhodes et al., 2005).

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Rhodes et al. (2005) reported a potentially negative outcome of mentoring might be evidenced during adolescence due to developmental issues, such as the struggle between acceptance and rejection. It should be remembered that mentoring relationships are not immune to negative experiences, disappointments, or relationship conflicts. Therefore, special care should be taken into consideration when matching potential mentors with the students (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2005). When mentoring programs were evaluated, programs that had implemented practices providing training and support for the mentors, as well as structured activities, achieved a higher level of success with the students being mentored. Additionally, increasing communication and encouraging the involvement of parents in the program resulted in successful mentoring outcomes (Jekielek et al., 2002).

There have been several studies (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002;

DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008) examining the long-term benefits of youth mentoring programs. While these studies have supported the improvement in the measured areas of academic achievement and employment outcomes, the long-term benefit of these associations appeared to be insignificant and contingent upon program practice. In an effort to strengthen the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, Rhodes (2005) developed a mentoring model outlining the formation of positive mentoring relationships. In that model, the most important aspect of the mentoring relationship is the formation of a strong emotional bond between the mentor and the mentee characterized by trust, mutuality, and empathy. Development of an emotional connection evolves over a period of time, during which the mentor and mentee spend significant time together, generally more than a year in duration. The next component in the development of a beneficial mentoring relationship is the quality of their interactions, focusing on providing the mentee a level of support and a commitment of scheduled time. Mentoring relationships are strengthened by emphasizing the interests and preferences of the adolescent being mentored, rather than focusing on the agenda or relationship expectations of the mentors themselves (DuBois et al., 2011). Rhodes (2005) proposed that a "well-established" mentor relationship contributes to a positive youth outcome by recognizing the significance the social-emotional, cognitive, and identity-related developmental processes associated with adolescence.

Influence of Mentoring/Student Advocacy on College Transitions

The FMSP administration wants to build upon research that supports mentoring and student advocacy as a program strategy that positively influences human capital investment decisions. Therefore, FMSP is expanding its mentoring services to help with successful college transition. Before mentoring programs can be endorsed as an effective

method of increasing a student's willingness to invest in his/her self as capital, rigorous evaluations of these programs still need to be performed. Confirmation of the efficacy of mentoring would help not-for-profit organizations develop effective goals and strategies that strengthen the student success initiatives of current and future mentoring programs, specifically in reference to potential human capital investment (DuBois et al., 2011).

Youth mentoring presents an investment that will yield a significant positive return in terms of human capital. While there has been significant research investigating human capital theory and mentoring individually, the need still exists to determine the relationship, if any, between human capital theory and the role of youth mentoring on a student's postsecondary education decisions. The role of effective leadership increases a student's willingness to make human capital investments. *Human capital* is a term that loosely defines all of an individual's learned abilities, skills, or knowledge that makes him/her not only productive, but also able to exchange his/her skill set for income (Johnson, 2005). Recognizing the commonly held perception that income inequality is the primary barrier to human capital accumulation, FMSP attempts to remove income inequality as a barrier by providing access to postsecondary education through the scholarship program. One of the core organizational goals is to provide economically deprived individuals the ability to finance human capital investment. Organizationally, FMSP's administration understands that other factors influence an individual's human capital investment, noting that certain factors are nonpurchasable or are beyond individual control in relationship to human capital investment decisions, such as parental educational levels, race, genetics, cultural influences, family background, personal preferences, socioeconomic characteristics and constraints, etc. (Mejia & St-Pierre, 2007). However, using mentor and student advocate leadership, this program emphasizes

the student's human capital investment has a positive economic impact.

According to the Office of Justice Programs (2011), approximately 17.6 million youth would benefit from participation in a formal mentoring program. However, only 14% to 17% of these youth are involved in a formal, one-to-one mentoring program (Office of Justice Programs, 2011; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004). As FSMP officials attempt to incorporate all aspects of student success, the role of leadership and social capital theory has also been considered. The social capital that these children accumulate through positive relationships with caring adults facilitates the development of personal social and leadership skills (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006). Learning effective life strategies provides children with the internal tools necessary to develop into competent and capable adults (Jekielek et al., 2002).

Research Questions

Several research questions guided this study.

1. What do the program's scholarship recipients perceive was the role of mentoring in regards to their academic persistence and success in college?

2. What do the program's scholarship recipients perceive was the role of student advocacy in regards to their academic persistence and success in college?

3. What were the additional factors that contributed to his/her academic persistence in college?

4. How do these students describe their experiences transitioning from high school to a state college?

5. What factors influenced the scholarship recipient's persistence decisions?

6. What do the recipients of this scholarship program perceive as the benefits from receiving this scholarship?

7. What do the recipients of this scholarship program perceive as the challenges of attending college?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

According to Patton (2002), there is not a "perfect research design" (p. 223) because of limitations such as resources and time; however, the choice of research design still has an effect on the quality of data collection and the subsequent data analysis. The purpose of this study was to increase the program administrators' understanding of the scholarship recipient's perceptions of the role of mentoring and student advocacy in his/her academic success or college persistence. The information gained from the student perceptions will help program administrators develop effective interventions promoting continued student success, persistence, and college graduation. Additionally, this study filled a gap in the research regarding the benefits of continuing mentoring on academic success on FMSP scholarship recipients.

This chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct this study. The research design of this study was mixed methods. A brief discussion of the underlying rationale, philosophies, and components of this design method is presented along with descriptions of the study's participants, setting, research questions, and data collection analysis processes. This study filled an organizational research gap regarding role of mentoring and student advocacy in academic success and college persistence of the scholarship recipients. This study is best described as basic research. Basic research is different from evaluation research in that it is designed solely to contribute to the knowledge base of a subject; however, this knowledge might eventually result in theoretical evaluation (Patton, 2002).

Study Design

The design of this study was mixed methods, a combination of qualitative and

quantitative methods. The intent of this research was to understand a phenomenon better; therefore, qualitative methods were used (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is a process of inquiry that explores social or human problems by using interpretative and interactive methods. This method allowed the researcher to understand the phenomena through the perspective of the participant. The strength of this method was the opportunity for in-depth and flexible exploration of the research question or problem (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2001). Although the data is interpretive and flexible, qualitative research is a deliberate and conscious process of data interpretation and decisions (Rossman & Rallis, 2002).

This research study fell under the umbrella of phenomenological research. Phenomenological research focuses on the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007). The term *phenomenology* was first noted in 1795 in the philosophical writings of Kant. There are two types of phenomenology: hermeneutic and transcendental, developing from alternate philosophical ideations (Creswell, 2007). Laverty (2003) suggested that transcendental phenomenology is more interested in the "epistemological question of the nature of the relationship between the knower and the object of the study" (pp. 13-14). Therefore, the difference between hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology lies in the epistemological focus of the study. Transcendental phenomenology was used in this research study because the researcher is interested in the experiences of a specific group (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

The epistemological foundation of this study is a combination of postpositivism and constructivism. Qualitative research designs are frequently associated with an ontology known as constructivism. However, weaknesses in this epistemological approach have lead many social scientists to adopt an expansion of positivism known as

postpositivism, which assumes an objective, but imperfect, reality. The move from positivism emerged from researcher bias that was derived from recognizing individual perspectives preclude a completely objective or unbiased scientific inquiry (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Quantitative research is based on the statistical analysis of the physical and social sciences. Positivist epistemology often uses quantification to represent and analyze features of social reality (Gall et al., 2007) suggesting that there is constancy in social realities; hence allowing the development of measurable variables. However, this concept is inherently flawed according to constructivist epistemology due to variations in the meanings of variables in different settings, i.e., although each of the scholarship recipients was assigned an individual mentor, they did not share the exact experience. Therefore, constructivist research focuses on individual experiences, which are then subjected to analytic induction data analysis designed to uncover themes and patterns (Gall et al., 2007). Constructivism provided the epistemological base for this study. This philosophy differs from objectivism whose proponents argue the truth and meaning resides in objects independent of consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Researchers now recognize subtle influences of an observer, understanding this observer's bias effect on the researcher's ability to isolate variables. Although objectivism has been the primary epistemological approach of Western science, constructivism intertwines subjectivity and objectivity allowing the researcher to bind the two (Gall et al., 2007).

Study Setting and Participants

The research setting for this study was a state college in Northeast Florida that has approximately 60,000 students. Study participants were scholarship recipients of a postsecondary pilot program that provides continuing mentoring and student advocacy

services in a state college system. The researcher worked with the FMSP student advocate to obtain a list of all scholarship recipients enrolled in this particular college system. Study participants' personal contact information will be confidentially stored in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet at the researcher's business office for a period of three years. After the three-year period, all personal research data will be shredded. All FMSP scholarship recipients currently attending the state college in Northeast Florida were invited to participate in the research study through either personal interviews or a written survey. All FMSP scholarship recipients were invited to complete a written survey, while a volunteer population of six students participated in a 60-minute personal interview.

Participant Selection Criteria

All FMSP scholarship recipients who were enrolled in a multiple campus state college system in Northeast Florida during the Spring 2014 semester were invited to participate. All participants had to have graduated from high school and be a minimum of 18 years of age. The study participants did not receive compensation for participation. Additionally, participation in this study was voluntary and confidential (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

Instruments

A substantial increase in the number of students who start and complete college within six years has occurred (Hughes, 2012). In 2012, approximately 59% of students who matriculated to postsecondary education persisted to graduation in six years or less; however, only approximately 30% of students who are enrolled in a full time degree or certificate-seeking program persisted to graduation in three years (Hughes, 2012). Although this percentage is better than statistics reported in 2002, indicating that less than

50% of students entering postsecondary education did not graduate within seven years (NCPPHE, 2003), the need to develop a better understanding of persistence factors continues to exist. The United States' ability to compete in the global economy is diminished by the lack of an educated workforce (Hecker, 2004).

A long-term goal of FMSP is to identify, and then subsequently develop, specific interventions to increase the postsecondary academic success of the program scholarship recipients. The two study instruments utilized as part of this mixed-method research design were a web-based questionnaire and personal interviews. First, all scholarship participants were offered the opportunity to anonymously complete the web-based survey, The College Persistence Questionnaire, using the SurveyMonkey platform. Second, participants were offered the opportunity to volunteer for a qualitative individualized student interview that was personally administered and analyzed by the researcher. The questions asked in this interview were developed with the input and cooperation of FMSP administration and staff.

The College Persistence Questionnaire

The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) is an instrument developed by Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) to help colleges and universities understand the variables that might affect student retention and persistence decisions. This instrument is designed to provide colleges the data to

> (a) identify students at risk for dropping out, (b) discover why a given student is likely to discontinue his or her education, and (c) determine the variables that best distinguish undergraduates who will persist from those who will not persist at their institutions. (p. 2)

The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) is composed of 69 questions that measure ten factors: (a) academic integration, (b) academic motivation, (c) academic

efficacy, (d) financial strain, (e) social integration, (f) collegiate stress, (g) advising, (h) degree commitment, (i) institutional commitment, and (j) scholastic consciousness (Davidson et al., 2009). Participant responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "*very unsatisfied*" to "*very satisfied*" or "*very favorable"* to "*very unfavorable*" based upon the individual question (Davidson et al., 2009).

While the current version is based on ten factors, the initial CPQ developed by Davidson et al. (2009) posited eight themes as significant in student retention: academic orientation, financial strain, institutional and degree commitment, personality and psychological adjustment, social and academic integration, and support services satisfaction (Davidson et al., 2009; Lindheimer, 2011). The College Persistence Questionnaire was validated through two studies. Initially, 2,022 participants who attended Angelo State University, Appalachian State University, Greenville Technical College, and Troy University completed the CPQ online, and then a component analysis of the responses was used to determine a correlation between the components. A smaller follow-up study using the CPQ was conducted using 283 students. The results of this study indicated that lower degrees of institutional commitment, academic integration, and academic conscientiousness were statistically significant predictors of attrition (Davidson et al., 2009). Of the original 53 responses on the CPQ, 36 were determined to load reliably into one of six factors: (a) academic integration, (b) social integration, (c) supportive services satisfaction, (d) degree commitment, (e) institutional commitment, and (f) academic conscientiousness. The CPQv2 was proposed after Davidson and Beck noted that the original CPQ did not address many of the important themes noted in the retention literature. The CPQ consists of 36 original items and 47 new items. New data was collected from 2,584 undergraduates attending four postsecondary institutions. After

a principal component analysis, four new scales were identified and added to the six original factors. Colleges and universities often use this survey as an instrument to help identify students at-risk for attrition (Lindheimer, 2011).

The College Persistence Questionnaire Factors

1. Academic orientation. Academic orientation is a student's perceptions of the learning or educational environment. A student's learning orientation has historically been identified as having either a learning or grade focus. Students who possess a learning-oriented focus are motivated by knowledge accumulation. The students tend to have good study skills, demonstrate strong abstract reasoning abilities, and are self-motivated (Eison, Pollio, & Milton, 1982; Lindheimer, 2011). Conversely, students with a grade-oriented focus tend to have poor study skills and habits resulting in higher test anxiety and a lower grade point average. These same students also tended to score below average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (Eison et al., 1982; Lindheimer, 2011).

2. Financial stability. Financial stability of the student is and has been a factor influencing a student's persistence decisions. The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reported that only 25% of low-income students completed their bachelor's degree within six years, in comparison to the 56% of high-income students. Financial variables consistently have been shown to be a contributing factor in multiple models of student retention in regards to their effect on persistence (Cabrera et al., 1992; Davidson et al., 2009; Somers, 1995; St. John, Paulsen & Starkey, 1996). Additionally, the financial stability factors appear to be more significant in African American students whose persistence choices are tied to economic aid, than Caucasian students who are more likely to secure a student loan to pay for postsecondary education if scholarships or federal financial aid is unavailable (St. Paul, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Students who are

financially strained report anxiety over their ability to cover the cost of college while also supporting themselves. Additionally, financially strained students report feeling inadequate when they compared themselves to the financial situations of other students (Davidson et al., 2009). According to Ishitani and DesJardins (2002), when students of similar economic circumstances were compared, students who received financial aid demonstrated a lower dropout rate than students receiving no aid.

3. Institutional commitment. Institutional commitment measures the degree to which a student can identify with the college or university. If a student is unhappy with his or her present academic institution, he/she might transfer to another college or university, or choose to drop out of college altogether. Several studies have established institutional commitment as having a positive correlation with student persistence decisions (Brock, 2010; Drake, 2011; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003; Padgett & Reid, 2003). Mentoring and support groups have been influential in increasing a student's perception of institutional commitment.

4. Degree commitment. Degree commitment is indicative of the value the student places upon successfully obtaining a college degree. Davidson et al. (2009) differentiated between instructional commitment and degree commitment, discussing that although a student might be unhappy with his/her current academic institution, he/she is still committed to obtaining a college education, or vice versa. Consequently, students who display a high degree of commitment to earning a college degree demonstrate a higher rate of persistence than students who place little value on obtaining a college education (Cofer & Summers, 2000).

5. Personality and psychological adjustment. Personality and psychological adjustment are also factors in student persistence decisions. These variables measure a

student's ability to cope with the stressors associated with attending college. Bean and Eaton (2000; 2001-2002) have proposed a psychological model of retention focusing on a student's stress coping strategies. This model emphasizes the role of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), coping strategies (Aldwin, 2007), and personal control (Perry, 2003) as significant variables in student retention (Davidson et al., 2009).

6. Social integration. Social integration measures the degree to which students perceive they belong to others in the college environment through shared values and/or similarity to other students (Davidson et al., 2009). Tinto (1993) reported that students who had cultivated positive relationships with peers earned better grades, as well as persisted when compared to students who were not socially integrated. Multiple researchers have confirmed Tinto's theory positing the role of social integration in student persistence over the last decade (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Hartley, 2011; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Kennedy, Sheckley, and Kehrhahn (2000) reiterated that the measure to which a student, even a student who demonstrates low academic performance, identifies with other students is correlated to student persistence. Nicpon et al. (2007) also emphasized the role of a student's friends in persistence decisions. Hendel (2007) conducted a study that indicated that students who participated in freshman seminars reported a higher sense of community.

7. Academic integration. Academic integration is the student's perception of the school's ability to contribute to the student obtaining his/her personal goals. These perceptions are based upon a student's view of the curriculum and faculty instruction. Variables that contribute to academic integration include the quality of the instruction, feelings of intellectual growth, and class discussion (Davidson et al., 2009). The

importance of a student's academic integration is recognized as influencing student retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) reported that frequent informal contacts with faculty members increased a student's perceptions of academic integration. Although well documented in the literature, higher education institutions continue to have difficulty developing effective programs to increase student involvement in the academic milieu of the college or university (Tinto, 2006).

When considering the role of either academic or social integration, it is important to understand that a widely accepted metric for these factors has not been developed. Historically, different researchers have integrated different variables and items to form the scales for their research studies, including student involvement perceptions and behaviors. Braxton, Duster, and Pascarella (1988) examined the role of student advising in student persistence; and Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) researched the role of student engagement in classroom discussions as a factor in student persistence. Other salient factors such as access to library resources (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987) and student perceptions of other students (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997) also have been considered significant factors influencing student persistence. Davidson et al. (2009) based the questionnaire item pool on the persistence research of Bean (1985); Bean and Metzner (1985); Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995); Cabrera et al. (1992); Pascarella and Terenzini (1980). Additionally, Davidson et al. (2009) used the following criteria to develop the scales for academic and social integration. First, one other study had empirically related the variable to persistence; second, the indicator demonstrated internal consistency with items investigated in other studies; and finally, all research had identified and used a diverse group of students in the research study.

8. Student support. The final factor identified by Davidson et al. (2009) is

student support services satisfaction. Support services integration measures the students' perceptions and attitudes about how well the school is meeting their needs outside of the classroom. This factor was one of the earliest identified as a significant theme when researching student outcomes and retention (Astin & Scherei, 1980; Bean, 1985; Braxton & Brier, 1989; Pascarella, 1985). Several issues have remained consistent in the research as to the role of support services in student persistence. This factor includes variables measuring the student's perception of the institutional quality of communication regarding the rules and regulations of the college, the student's perception of policy fairness, and the level of student participation in organizational decisions (Aitken, 1982; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Johnson, 1997). Student social support variables also include the amount of interpersonal affirmation the student receives regarding his/her higher education goals. Several research studies have confirmed the association of encouragement from a student's family, friends, and faculty in an individual's persistence decisions (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002-2003; Mallinckrodt, 1988; Munro, 1981; Nicpon et al., 2006-2007; Stage & Rushin, 1993). According to The National Survey of Student Engagement (2004), students who perceived their institution's advising as either good or excellent reported higher college satisfaction levels.

Although the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) can be used as a stand-alone instrument, Davidson et al. (2009) reported a significant improvement in the ability to predict persistence when combined with other performance measures such as a student's high school rank and standardized test scores. In addition, they also reported that the Institutional Commitment factor provided the best prediction of student persistence. The Academic Conscientiousness factor and Academic Integration factor also provided statistically significant indications of college persistence. When used with

the precollege indicators, the CPQ significantly improved an institution's ability to identify at-risk students.

Personal Interviews

The interview process. Face-to-face interviews are a valuable scientific method that allows the researcher to gather information and better understand the impact or role of program policies on participants (Dillman et al., 2009; Salant & Dillman, 1994). The researcher of this study strove to administer every question to the participant in a consistent, standardized manner, with as little outside influence as possible. Research questions were delivered in a neutral tone to reduce the possibility of influencing the participants' answers (Dillman et al., 2009; Oishi, 2003; Salant & Dillman, 1994). Additionally, the researcher made every effort to create a welcome, comfortable, and appropriate environment for the one-to-one interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to select the interview setting, as well as to determine the extent of their willingness to share personal experiences and opinions (Dillman et al., 2009; Oishi, 2003; Salant & Dillman, 1994). Finally, research participants had the opportunity to discontinue participation in the interview at any time during the interview process (Dillman et al., 2009; Oishi, 2003; Salant & Dillman, 1994). Understanding that interviewer bias is a threat to the internal validity of the study; the researcher attempted to be aware of any bias that might have influenced the results (Dillman et al., 2009; Salant & Dillman, 1994).

The qualitative portion of this study used personal interviews to collect data. Kvale (1983) stated that the purpose of the interview is "to gather descriptions of the life-word of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 174). Although this data can be collected in many ways, the face-to-face

interview is the most common because it allows the researcher the opportunity to gain additional information from social cues such as body language and verbal intonation. A potential bias exists in face-to-face interviews because the participant can respond to the researcher's social cues; therefore, the researcher must pay special attention to the interview effect (Opdenakker, 2006). The researcher has the opportunity to create a positive interview atmosphere in face-to face interviews, control the flow of the questions, and manage the time allotted for the interview. Another advantage of face-to-face interviews is the spontaneous nature of the study participant's responses. After receiving permission from the participants, face-to-face interviews can be tape-recorded or the researcher can manually take notes of the participant's responses to the question. There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods (Opdenakker, 2006). This population has a vested financial and long-term interest in the program. Consequently, the researcher considered the study participants might perceive any negative feedback could have negative repercussions on his/her status within the program; therefore, the researcher chose to take notes manually of the interviewee responses. One of the primary reasons the researcher chose to take notes manually was to minimize the potential power asymmetry that could inhibit open and free responses to interview questions. The researcher considered that due to the younger target population of this study, special consideration needed to be paid to gain personal trust and rapport of the subjects (Creswell, 2013).

Personal face-to-face 60-minute interviews were conducted with six scholarship recipients who volunteered for the study. If more than ten scholarship recipients had volunteered, the names would have been placed in a bowl, and the first ten names drawn would have been selected to participate in the personal interviews. The researcher is a

trained mental health professional who is qualified to transcribe interview answers, manually transcribed all personal interviews. Interview participants were offered the opportunity to review his/her transcript to confirm and clarify his/her statements for accuracy; however, none of the study participants chose to do so (Creswell, 2013).

Procedures

An informed consent participation form was e-mailed to the 54 scholarship recipients attending this college system during the 2014 spring term inviting them to participate in the study. Of the 54 students invited to participate, 26 ($N = 26$) completed the anonymous online College Persistence Questionnaire, and six participated in the face-to-face interviews. The student advocate e-mailed the study participation request and informed consent to the scholarship recipients multiple times over a 60-day period. The participants were given an introductory letter introducing the researcher and providing a summary of the research purpose. Additionally, the researcher provided the student advocate with hard copies of the study participation request and informed consent to give to students personally. After receiving and reviewing the study request, ten scholarship participants gave the student advocate permission to give the researcher their contact information for the face-to-face interviews. Although the researcher attempted to contact all ten students who volunteered for the face-to-face interviews multiple times, only six responded. An informed consent form to interview and manually transcribe the face-to-face interviews was obtained from the six scholarship students who participated in the interview process. For validity purposes, the researcher allowed the interview participants to review his/her responses to the face-to-face interview questions, as well as to clarify any of the interview answers (Dillman et al., 2009; Salant & Dillman, 1994).

College Persistence Questionnaire. The 54 potential study participants were

identified by the student advocate based upon the number of scholarship recipients enrolled in the North Florida college system during the 2014 spring term. A direct link to the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ), located on the SurveyMonkey platform, and the study participation information was provided to the 54 potential participants. Study participation information provided to the scholarship recipients via e-mail noted that the questionnaire responses were anonymous, study participation was voluntary, the online questionnaire platform allowed the student to take the questionnaire at his/her convenience, and participants could withdrawal from the study at any time during the process. Detailed written instructions on how to complete the questionnaire, as well as contact information for the researcher in case the questions needed clarification, was also provided to the study participants.

Individual interviews. In-depth interviewing is a valuable research tool commonly utilized in qualitative research (Dillman et al., 2009; Oishi, 2003; Salant & Dillman, 1994; Willig, 2003). Using evaluation surveys, researchers can gain insight and knowledge regarding the impact of program policies on private or public organizations (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Individual participant interviews were conducted using the semistructured format. An interview guide for the open-ended questions (Appendix) was developed by the researcher based on information from the literature review that focused on the role of mentoring and student advocacy on the postsecondary persistence decisions of the scholarship recipients, and the interview questions were then validated by consulting with FMSP administrators and other student advocates. These open-ended interview questions were designed to capture the direct experiences, stories, and opinions of the study participants based on the research questions and the information discovered in the literature review. Further, the researcher asked the interview questions in the same

order and manner with all of the study participants without leading the participant's responses or conclusion.

After the researcher received verbal confirmation of a student's willingness to participate in the study, an interview time and location convenient to the participant was arranged. The researcher asked the study participant to schedule a time and place that would allow the students to talk freely without being overheard or distracted, such as a library. Before beginning the actual interview process, the researcher explained the research study and informed consent to participants. After asking if the participant had questions or concerns, he/she was asked to sign the form, and then was provided a copy of the informed consent form. Although the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions or concerns regarding the study, none were verbalized (Dillman et al., 2009; Oishi, 2003; Salant & Dillman, 1994; Willig, 2003). Interviews conducted in phenomenological studies provide the research participants the opportunity to share their stories and individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the study participants to provide individual details and experiences. Using the open-ended interview questions as a template allowed the researcher to discover valuable information regarding the participant's experiences and opinions (Dillman et al., 2009).

Data Collection

The researcher requested written permission to conduct the study from the chief executive officer of FMSP. A written letter confirmed the researcher could conduct the research study with program scholarship participants. The researcher also received approval from the Institutional Review Boards from Nova Southeastern University and the specific state college system in Northeast Florida. The researcher sent a letter of

request to W. Davidson, PhD., for permission to use the College Persistence Questionnaire in the survey. Permission was granted. The questions for the face-to-face interview questions were developed with the input and approval of FSMP administrators and student advocates. After reviewing the literature on qualitative best practices, an interview template utilizing open-ended questions was developed focusing on the role of mentoring and student advocacy in postsecondary persistence decisions (Dillman et al., 2009). Although 25 questions were originally proposed, ten questions were omitted to maintain the scope of research focus on mentoring and persistence. Two final questions were added to allow the study participant the opportunity to offer additional insight, comments, and/or experiences that might not have been considered by the researcher or the FMSP administrators

All 54 FMSP scholarship recipients initially were contacted via e-mail to request voluntary participation in either the anonymous online survey or the face-to-face interviews. A copy of the informed consent was attached to the introductory study e-mail. Informed consent was obtained through participants completing the anonymous online survey or through a signed consent form for the participants of the face-to-face interviews. The researcher was unable to identify the scholarship recipients who did or did not complete the survey. A scholarship recipient's choice to participate or not had no influence in his/her relationship with FMSP. Selection of the study participants was equitable because all scholarship recipients attending one of the state colleges in Northeast Florida campuses were invited to participate in the study.

While all of the 54 scholarship recipients were invited to participate in the research study, only ten of the students volunteered to participate in the face-to-face interviews. The researcher attempted to contact all ten students who volunteered using e-

mail, telephone calls, and text messages. However, only six students responded to the researcher's contact attempts; therefore, four students were not interviewed because they did not respond. Because a saturation of data was noted during the analysis, the researcher did not continue to contact the four remaining study volunteers. The researcher met with six scholarship recipients individually face-to-face for approximately one hour in a neutral location. After explaining the rationale for the study, which was to better understand the role of mentoring and/or student advocacy in his/her academic success and persistence, an informed consent was signed by each of the face-to-face study participants. While explaining informed consent, the participants initialed all of the sections of the form including the opportunity for each interviewee to review his or her responses or to withdraw from the study at any point. The researcher then asked each participant the 17 questions from the semistructured interview (Appendix). The researcher transcribed the interviews manually. To ensure participant anonymity, the participants are identified by an anonymous alphabetic alias such as "Betty" in the study data analysis and results.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data examines the lived experiences of the research participant by attempting to understand the interpretation of experiences and events in an individual's life through his/her perceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the data strives to provide the research participant's perspective, the researcher's own worldview, combined with the interactions between the participant and the researcher need to be considered in the data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Study findings were based on data collected from the scholarship recipients

attending a state college in Northeast Florida during the spring semester of 2014. Research data obtained from the personal face-to-face interviews was analyzed using qualitative research analysis software MAXQDA11. Personal interviews were analyzed using text analysis to identify trends and issues that identified important words or phrases and emerging themes (Creswell, 2012). The participants completed the College Persistence Questionnaire on the SurveyMonkey Platform. To protect participant communication, SurveyMonkey has an SSL encryption feature for the secure transmission of study data. By using the SSL encryption, the study participants IP addresses were masked for the researcher (SurveyMonkey, 2013). The data obtained from the College Persistence Questionnaire was analyzed using quantitative statistical methods to determine if any trends exist in this specific population of scholarship students through cross tabulating data to determine the interrelatedness of questions. The results of the statistical analysis were reported to determine which factors or survey questions identified by the College Persistence Questionnaire are relevant in understanding a student's college persistence decisions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asked, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). Data analysis, coding methods and theme categorization can affect the accuracy and validity of the study results. Patton (2002) noted that a qualitative research study should be concerned about validity and reliability when designing the study and analyzing the data. Healy and Perry (2000) proposed that credibility or neutrality, consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability is the basic criteria for qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using the term "dependability" (p. 300) instead of reliability in qualitative research to correspond to the quantitative concept of

reliability.

Trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility provide qualitative research validity. To increase the study's validity and credibility, the researcher also used triangulation, to "search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The validity of the research findings was evaluated for accuracy and credibility though the comparison of trends noted in the personal interviews with the factors measured in the College Persistence Questionnaire. Participants in the personal interview also were allowed to verify their responses by reviewing the field notes, as well as the opportunity to provide feedback or comments regarding the accuracy of the field notes. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the scholarship organization, as well as approval from the Internal Review Boards (IRB) of Nova Southeastern University and the specific state college in Northeast Florida. No further approvals were requested or necessary.

Ethical Considerations

This study was based upon the empirical studies regarding mentoring, student advocacy, student engagement, and persistence in regards to postsecondary persistence. Although the data from this study was exploratory in nature, it offers insight into the persistence decisions of FMSP scholarship recipients. Because human subjects were used to conduct this study, multiple steps were taken to ensure the protection and privacy of the subjects. The researcher provided detailed informed consent information that detailed the rationale of the study, the voluntary nature of his/her participation, as well as the option to withdraw participation from the study at any time without penalty. The participants also were provided additional contact information, e.g., e-mail, telephone number to contact the researcher with additional information. The researcher will store

the results of the anonymous survey and the face-to-face personal interviews for a period of three years in a secure location, after which time the researcher will destroy the data. The participants' identities will remain anonymous, and any identifying information was omitted.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This mixed methods study explored and analyzed the perceptions and experiences of a small cohort of FMSP scholarship recipients attending a multiple campus college system in Northeast Florida about the role of mentoring and student advocacy in their college persistence decisions. From an organizational perspective, the empirical data gathered from this study may have policy and procedures implications. Additionally, this data will help validate the continuation and/or expansion of mentoring and student advocacy services during the program participant's transition from high school to college. This preliminary persistence data will also be valuable to program administrators by providing baseline indicators of academic success and/or program effectiveness regarding postsecondary program expansion. This chapter presents the analysis and observation results from the quantitative data (College Persistence Questionnaire) and qualitative data (the face-to-face personal interviews).

This study sought to address several research questions. These questions provided the basic framework, as well as guide for the organizational structure of this chapter. The research questions are the following:

1. How do the students perceive the role of mentoring in regards to their academic persistence and success in college?

2. What do the program scholarship recipients believe was the role of student advocacy in regards to their academic persistence and success in college?

3. What were the additional factors that contributed to his/her academic persistence in college?

4. How do these students describe their experiences transitioning from high

school to a state college?

5. What factors influence the scholarship recipient's persistence decisions?

6. What do the recipients of this scholarship program perceive as the benefits of receiving this scholarship?

7. What do the recipients of this scholarship program perceive as the challenges of attending college?

Descriptive Data

This study focused on FSMP scholarship recipients who were attending a multiple campus state college system in North Florida during the 2014 spring term. The data considered were from the results of the administration of the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) and face-to-face personal interviews to selected program participants. The researcher invited all scholarship recipients, a total of 54, via e-mail to participate in the anonymous online questionnaire (CPQ), the face-to-face personal interviews, or both (B. Jennings, personal communication, April 15, 2014). Of the 54 scholarship recipients contacted, 26 ($N = 26$) completed the CPQ and 6 ($n = 6$) participated in the face-to-face interviews.

Participant Data

There were 54 FMSP scholarship recipients ranging in age from 18 to 23 years old registered for classes during the 2014 spring term. According to the student advocate, of the 54 students, there were 44 females (81%) and 10 males (19%). Overall, there were 38 (70.3%) African Americans students, 10 (18.5%) nonHispanic Caucasians students, one (2%) Asian student, three (5.5%) Hispanic students, and two (3.7%) multiracial students registered for classes. A further breakdown of program demographics yielded results indicating of the 44 females participants, 29 (66%) were Black, 10 (23%) were

nonHispanic Caucasian, one (2%) was Asian, two (4.5%) were Hispanic, and two (4.5%) were Multiracial. Of the 10 males, nine (90%) were African American, and one (10%) was Hispanic (R. Roberts, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

A comparable demographic profile between the program and respondent groups allowed the data to be generalized to the program level (Table 1). The smaller sample group is demographically representative of the larger local scholarship group; therefore, the findings from the smaller group can be generalized to the local program level (Gall et al., 2007). However, it should be noted that the local program demographics vary from the FSMPs statewide demographics of Asian 4%, Hispanic 25%, nonHispanic Caucasian 38%, and African American 33% (TSIC, 1013, 2014). Consequently, there could be regional demographic differences throughout the state; therefore, the results of this study might not be generalizable to different statewide programs.

Table 1

FMSP Demographic Comparison

Demographics	Participants		
	CPQ %	Local %	State %
Male	32.00	19.00	
Female	68.00	81.00	
African American	66.67	70.30	33.0
Asian	0.00	2.00	3.0
Caucasian	12.50	18.50	38.0
Hispanic	12.50	5.50	25.0
Multiracial	8.33	6.50	3.0

Quantitative Results

Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program had 54 students who were eligible to complete the CPQ during the study timeframe of which, 26 (44%) of the students responded to the questionnaire. The sample population used for the quantitative analysis

of the CPQ was 26 ($N = 26$). However, not all of the students responded to every question; consequently, there is missing data. The total number of student questionnaire responses was 1224 out of a possible 1534, or 80%. The students who completed this survey ranged in age from 18 to 23, with 68% of the respondents being females, and 32% being males. The ethnic and racial breakdown of the participants was 12.5% nonHispanic Caucasian, 12.5% Hispanic, 66.67% African American, and 8.33% multiracial. Of the 26 students completing the questionnaire, 64% lived with his/her parents, 8% lived alone, and 28% lived with a roommate or spouse. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents worked at least 10 hours per week. Eight percent of the questionnaire respondents were married, and 4.17% reported having children.

The CPQ data was reviewed and analyzed using a 2-tailed *t* test (CI 95%) allowing the researcher to explore student perceptions about the CPQ factors, as well as allowing the researcher to test for differences between the subsets. The CPQ is scored on a 5-point Likert scale with question values ranging from -2 to +2. According to one of the questionnaire authors, the items measured in the College Persistence Scale can be interpreted at face value (W. Davidson, personal conversation, December 5, 2014). Therefore, the researcher was able to interpret the study participant's responses using zero as the base mean. The CPQ measures ten unique factors; a brief description of each follows. *Academic integration* measures a student's positive views of his/her own academic growth, an awareness of the role of education in career choice, and his/her positive perceptions of the college instructors and coursework. *Academic motivation* measures a student's enjoyment of academic tasks and a willingness to devote extra time and energy to learning, while *academic efficacy* measures a student's confidence in his/her academic skills and potential outcomes. *Financial strain* measures a student's

concern over financial worries, as well as his/her perception of a financial disadvantage in relationship to others. *Social integration* measures a student's overall sense of belonging and similarity to others along with a sense of positive social involvement. *Collegiate stress* measures the student's sense of pressure, and feelings of sacrifice and distress in relationship to the postsecondary environment. *Advising* is a measurement of a student's positive views of advising and communication. *Degree commitment* measures the student's perception of certainty and support in his/her degree completion, while *institutional commitment* is a measurement of a student's loyalty and confidence in his/her school choice along with the intent to re-enroll. Finally, *scholastic conscientiousness* measures the student's ability to complete his/her academic requirements in a timely manner (Beck & Davidson, 2013).

CPQ Overall Results

An overall 2-tailed *t* test analysis of the ten academic persistence factors measured by the CPQ indicated that the scholarship recipients who responded to the questionnaire had scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in eight of the ten factors that are associated with a student's intent to persist: academic efficacy ($t(118) = 6.94$, $p = <.0001$), academic integration ($t(163) = 13.14$, $p = <.0001$), academic motivation ($t(189) = 4.76$, $p = <.0001$), advising ($t(93) = 11.18$, $p = <.0001$), degree commitment ($t(144) = 19.78$, $p = <.0001$), institutional commitment ($t(91) = 6.53$, $p = <.0001$), scholastic consciousness ($t(87) = 8.53$, $p = <.0001$), and social integration ($t(140) = 3.93$, $p = <.0001$) (Table 2). Conversely, the study participants did not report scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in the areas associated with barriers to persistence: financial strain ($t(95) = 88$, $p = .38$) or collegiate stress ($t(94) = -0.94$, $p = .35$). However, the CPQ persistence factor data differed between subgroups

of scholarship recipients, for example Hispanic study participants reported a significant level of collegiate stress ($t(10) = -3.50$, $p = .007$) and Multiracial study participants reported a significant level financial strain ($t(8) = -3.00$, $p = .02$). Therefore, to understand the study participants' postsecondary persistence decisions better, the data also was analyzed by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Table 2

College Persistence Questionnaire Factors: Overall Results

Factors	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Academic Integration	0.99	0.97	13.14	1.98	<.0001	.13	.82
Academic Motivation	0.40	1.16	4.76	1.97	<.0001	.23	.5
Academic Efficacy	0.63	0.99	6.94	1.98	<.0001	.45	.81
Financial Strain	0.14	1.51	0.88	1.99	.3803	-.17	.44
Social Integration	0.40	1.20	3.93	1.98	.0001	-.26	1.05
Collegiate Stress	-0.13	1.31	-0.94	1.99	.3514	-.39	.14
Advising	1.00	0.87	11.18	1.99	<.0001	.82	1.18
Degree Commitment	1.49	0.91	19.80	1.98	<.0001	1.34	1.64
Institutional Commitment	0.98	1.44	6.53	1.99	<.0001	.68	1.28
Scholastic Conscientiousness	0.99	1.09	8.52	1.99	<.0001	.76	1.22

CPQ Gender Results

The CPQ data from the FMSP study participants was analyzed to determine if gender influenced the college persistence decisions. However, as noted in Table 3, the comparison between the male and female participants did not yield significantly different scores at the .05 levels, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in any persistence factor examined. The results of the individual factors are as follows: academic efficacy ($t(118) = -0.14$, $p = 0.89$), academic integration ($t(163) = 1.75$, $p = 0.82$), academic motivation ($t(189) = 0.85$, $p = 0.396$), advising ($t(93) = -0.52$, $p = 0.60$), collegiate stress ($t(94) = -1.53$, $p = 0.13$), degree commitment ($t(144) = 1.27$, $p = 0.21$), financial strain ($t(95) =$

0.88, p = 0.78), institutional commitment (t(91) = -0.10, p = 0.92), social integration (t(140) = -1.79, p = 0.08) or scholastic conscientiousness (t(87) = 0.81, p = 0.42).

Yet, when looking at male and female study participants independently, both the male and female participants did report scores significant at the .05 levels, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in all of the CPQ factors measuring persistence except academic motivation, collegiate stress, and financial strain. Neither males nor females scored significantly high in the areas of collegiate stress (male, t(29) = 0.74, p = .47; female, t(64) = -1.57, p = .12) or financial strain, (male, t(30) = 0.85, p = .41; females, t(64) = 0.54, p = .60). However, a comparison of the female and male participants indicated a significantly higher score in the female participants in the factor of academic motivation (male, t(60) = 1.96, p = .05; females, t(128) = 4.43, p = <.0001). Both genders scored significantly higher results on the factors measuring academic efficacy (male, t(36) = 4.29, p = .0001; female, t(81) = 5.49, p = <.0001), academic integration (male, t(52) = 5.43, p = <.0001; female, t(110) = 12.62, p = <.0001), advising (male, t(29) = 7.06, p = <.0001; female, t(64) = 8.70, p = <.0001), degree commitment (male, t(44) = 8.39, p = <.0001; female, t(99) = 19.01, p = <.0001), institutional commitment (male, t(28) = 4.02, p = .0004; female, t(62) = 5.15, p = <.0001), social integration (male, t(45) = 3.70, p = .0006; female, t(94) = 2.22. p = .03), and scholastic consciousness (male, t(26) = 4.12, p = .0004; female, t(61) = 7.45, p = <.0001) were noted (Table 3).

Gender has been identified as a predictor of academic success (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008; Feliciano, 2012). Women are earning 58% of Bachelor degrees awarded in the United States (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008). Moreover, females in every race or ethnic group were more likely to persist to degree completion, with nonHispanic Caucasian females

the most likely to persist (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Buchmann et al., 2008; Feliciano, 2012). Conversely, an earlier study conducted by Leppel (2002) reported that African American females were three percent more likely than nonHispanic Caucasian females to persist to degree completion.

Table 3

College Persistence Questionnaire Factors: Gender

Factors	M	F	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Academic Integration	X		0.79	1.06	5.42	2.01	<.0001	.50	1.09
		X	1.09	0.91	12.62	1.98	<.0001	-.63	.14
Academic Motivation	X		0.30	1.73	1.96	2.00	.05	-.006	.60
		X	0.45	1.15	4.43	1.98	<.0001	.25	.65
Academic Efficacy	X		0.65	0.92	4.29	2.03	.0001	.34	.95
		X	0.62	1.03	5.49	1.99	<.0001	.40	.85
Financial Strain	X		0.19	1.28	0.84	2.04	.41	-.27	.66
		X	0.11	1.61	0.54	2.00	.59	-.30	.51
Social Integration	X		0.65	1.20	3.70	2.01	.001	.30	1.01
		X	0.27	1.18	2.22	1.99	.029	-.04	.51
Collegiate Stress	X		0.17	1.23	0.74	2.04	.47	-.29	.12
		X	-0.26	1.34	-1.57	2.00	.12	-.53	.07
Advising	X		1.07	0.83	7.06	2.04	<.0001	.76	1.37
		X	0.97	0.89	8.70	2.00	<.0001	.75	1.18
Degree Commitment	X		1.33	1.07	8.39	2.01	<.0001	1.01	1.65
		X	1.56	0.82	19.01	1.98	<.0001	1.40	1.72
Institutional Commitment	X		1.00	1.34	4.02	2.05	.0004	.49	1.51
		X	0.97	1.49	5.15	2.00	<.0001	.59	1.34
Scholastic Conscientiousness	X		0.84	1.05	4.12	2.06	.0004	.42	1.27
		X	1.04	1.11	7.45	2.00	<.0001	.77	1.33

A review of the literature revealed that low-income males and males without a father present in the home were less likely to persist (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Esparza, 2014). Low-income nonHispanic Caucasian and Hispanic males were the most

underrepresented groups in college. Consequently, nonHispanic Caucasian and Hispanic males are the least likely to persist to degree completion (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Buchmann et al., 2008; Feliciano, 2012).

CPQ Race and Ethnicity Results

To help the researcher better understand the college persistence decisions of the study participants, the CPQ responses were also analyzed using a 2-tailed *t* test by the following race and ethnicity categories: African American, nonHispanic Caucasian, Hispanic, and Multiracial. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 4. Cross comparisons of these groups were analyzed to determine if there were differences or similarities in persistence decisions between the racial or ethnic groups. Upon examining the results of the CPQ by race and ethnicity, commonalities and differences emerged including Tinto's retention model that emphasized the role of academic integration or the student's overall classroom experience in student retention (Hartley, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The only two factors that yielded scores significantly different at the .05 levels, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) to all of the study participants were academic integration, or the positive views a student has of his/her academic growth, understanding of the role of education in his/her career, and positive feelings towards the college instructors and coursework, (African American, $t(103) = 11.97$, $p = <.0001$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(20) = 2.91$, $p = .02$; Hispanic, $t(17) = 3.71$, $p = .0017$; Multiracial, $t(13) = 5.51$, $p = .0001$), and degree commitment (African American, $t(93) = 18.85$, $p = <.0001$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(17) = 5.17$, $p = <.0001$; Hispanic, $t(14) = 2.48$, $p = .03$; Multiracial, $t(11) = 11.73$, $p = <.0001$). However, a cross comparison of the persistence factor of academic integration indicated scores significantly different at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) between the African American and nonHispanic

Caucasian program participants ($t(124) = 4.83$, $p = .00008$), as well as between the African American and Hispanic responses ($t(121) = -2.82$, $p = 0.0486$). These findings replicated the results of an earlier study by Todman-Da Graca (2012) on the academic self-confidence and persistence of African American using the CPQ as one of the assessment instruments. Todman-Da Graca (2012) reported a strong association between self-confidence and CPQ factor of academic integration in the African American study subjects.

Academic efficacy, a student's confidence in his/her academic skills or outcomes, demonstrated scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in persistence decisions in all racial/ethnic groups, African American, $t(76) = 6.32$, $p = <.0001$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(14) = 4.03$, $p = .0013$; Multiracial, $t(9) = 6.71$, $p = <.0001$), except Hispanic ($t(11) = -0.84$, $p = .42$). A cross comparison between African Americans and Hispanics, ($t(88) = -2.46$, $p = .03$), as well as nonHispanic Caucasians and Hispanics, ($t(26) = 2.66$, $p = .02$), also indicated that Hispanics demonstrated less academic efficacy, According to research conducted by Choi (2005) and Kerpelman, Erygit, and Stevens (2008), academic efficacy is a strong predictor of academic outcomes and perceptions.

All racial/ethnic groups African American, $t(122) = 3.90$, $p = .0002$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(22) = 3.10$, $p = .0052$; Multiracial, $t(15) = 2.78$, $p = .0139$ except Hispanic, $t(19) = -1.19$, $p = .2492$ also had scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in the area of academic motivation. A cross comparison of this factor between African Americans and Hispanics, ($t(142) = -2.61$, $p = .0148$) and nonHispanic Caucasians and Hispanics ($t(42) = 2.48$, $p = .0072$) also indicated that Hispanics scored statistically different in academic motivation, or a student's enjoyment of academic tasks.

Additionally, all study participants (African American, $t(56) = 7.50$, $p = <.0001$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(9) = 3.97$, $p = .0032$; Multiracial, $t(7) = 7.64$, $p = .0001$), had scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in the area of scholastic conscientiousness except the Hispanics participants, ($t(8) = 0.20$, $p = .8487$) who did not support this as an important factor in persistence.

Light (2001) concluded, "Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81) after reviewing ten years of qualitative research. Although advising was significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in persistence for African Americans ($t(59) = 12.98$, $p = <.0001$) and multiracial ($t(7) = 2.97$, $p = .02$) participants, it did not seem to be a significant factor to nonHispanic Caucasians ($t(11) = .90$, $p = .39$) or Hispanics ($t(9) = 1.81$, $p = .10$). Further social integration, or a student's sense of belonging, similarity, and social integration appeared to be a factor in persistence to African American study participants ($t(88) = 4.76$, $p = <.0001$), it did not yield significant results in the other groups (Hispanic, $t(15) = 0.00$, $p = 1$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(15) = -0.46$, $p = .65$; Multiracial, $t(11) = 2.17$, $p = .05$). A significant level of institutional commitment, or a student's school loyalty and intent to re-enroll, was also reported by the African American students ($t(88) = 4.76$, $p = < .0001$), a trend not evidenced by the other students (nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(11) = 2.06$, $p = .06$; Hispanic, $t(9) = 2.01$, $p = .08$; Multiracial, $t(6) = 1.54$, $p = .17$).

A significant reduction (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in financial strain was also noted in the African American ($t(62) = 2.38$, $p = .02$) study participants, and it was not a factor in the nonHispanic Caucasian ($t(14) = .94$, $p = .36$) or Hispanic ($t(9) = -1.96$, $p = .08$) participants. However, in the Multiracial subgroup ($t(7) = -3.00$, $p = .02$), financial strain continued to be of concern. Finally, three of the four study subgroups

showed a decrease in collegiate stress (African American, $t(60) = -1.59$, $p = .12$; nonHispanic Caucasian, $t(11) = .82$, $p = .43$; Multiracial, $t(7) = 1.82$, $p = .11$). While the Hispanic subgroups responses ($t(9) = -3.50$, $p = .0067$) indicated that collegiate stress is a negative factor in college persistence decisions. This trend was also demonstrated in cross comparisons between African Americans and Hispanics ($t(70) = -2.36$, $p = .03$), nonHispanic Caucasians and Hispanics ($t(21) = 3.08$, $p = .01$), and Multiracial and Hispanics ($t(17) = 3.57$, $p = .00$) and indicate that, overall, Hispanics experienced more collegiate stress. According to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center (2013), Hispanic students place a high value on education. However, 74% of the 16- to 25-year-old Hispanic respondents surveyed reported that they did not pursue postsecondary education due to cultural pressure to financially support and/or contribute to the family (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013).

Table 4

CPQ Factors by Race or Ethnicity: African American

African American	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Academic Integration	1.17	0.99	11.97	1.98	<.0001	.98	1.38
Academic Motivation	0.41	1.18	3.90	1.98	.0002	.20	.63
Academic Efficacy	0.68	0.94	6.31	1.99	<.0001	.46	.89
Financial Strain	0.46	1.53	2.38	2.00	.0202	.07	.85
Social Integration	0.61	1.20	4.76	1.99	<.0001	.35	.86
Collegiate Stress	-0.26	1.29	-1.59	2.00	.1175	-.59	.07
Advising	1.26	0.76	12.98	2.00	<.0001	1.07	1.46
Degree Commitment	1.60	0.82	18.85	1.99	<.0001	1.43	1.76
Institutional Commitment	1.10	1.42	5.95	2.00	<.0001	.73	1.47
Scholastic Conscientiousness	1.05	1.06	7.50	2.00	<.0001	.77	1.33

Greene (2005) reported only seven percent of African Americans attending community college receive a degree within six years, the smallest percentage in

comparison to other racial/ethnic groups. However, the African American participants of this study demonstrated scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) on the factors associated with academic success and persistence: academic efficacy, academic integration, academic motivation, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, social integration, and scholastic conscientiousness (Table 4). Additionally, the African American participants in this study did not report a statistically significant level on the two factors that are contra-indicative of persistence, collegiate stress, and financial strain (Nasim, Roberts, Harrell, & Young, 2005).

Academic self-concept, or the perceptions a student has about his/her ability to perform and achieve academic goals successfully, has been attributed to persistence (Cokley, 2000; Greene, 2005; Nasim et al., 2005). Academic self-concept is often associated with academic success regardless of race or ethnicity (Barbartis, 2010; Nasim et al., 2005). However, according to a study conducted by Nasim et al. (2005), academic self-concept is a better predictor of academic success in African Americans students. Nasim et al. (2005) also reported that the African American participants in that study demonstrated significant levels in the CPQ persistence factors measuring academic efficacy, academic integration, academic motivation, advising, degree commitment, institutional commitment, social integration, or scholastic conscientiousness, while not reporting scores statistically significant in the factors measuring collegiate stress, and financial strain (Nasim et al., 2005). The results of this current study mirrored the CPQ results of Nasim et al. (2005), which is suggestive of strategies for academic success in this student population. Additionally, Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, and Yonai (2014) reported that the establishment of meaningful faculty-student interactions and advising relationships increase the positive feelings about the academic and institutional

environment in African American students. In turn, the establishment of strong inter-personal relationships increases academic persistence by reducing academic stress (Braxton, 2008).

Table 5

CPQ Factors by Race or Ethnicity: Hispanic

Hispanic	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Academic Integration	0.72	0.83	3.71	2.10	.0017	.31	1.13
Academic Motivation	-0.3	1.13	-1.19	2.09	.2492	-.83	.23
Academic Efficacy	-0.33	1.37	- 0.84	2.18	.4175	-1.20	.54
Financial Strain	-0.6	0.97	-1.96	2.23	.0811	-1.29	.09
Social Integration	0.00	1.26	0.00	2.12	1.000	-.67	.67
Collegiate Stress	-1.1	0.99	-3.50	2.23	.0067	-1.81	-.39
Advising	0.4	0.70	1.81	2.28	.1039	-.10	.90
Degree Commitment	0.87	1.36	2.48	2.13	.0267	.12	1.61
Institutional	0.8	1.26	2.01	2.23	.0751	-.10	1.70
Commitment	0.11	1.69	0.20	2.26	.8487	-1.19	1.41
Scholastic Conscientiousness							

The Hispanic participants of this study did not demonstrate scores significant at the .05 levels, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) on the factors associated with academic success and persistence: academic efficacy, academic motivation, advising, financial strain, institutional commitment, social integration, or scholastic conscientiousness (Table 5). However, unlike the other study participants, the Hispanic participants reported scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in the factor measuring collegiate stress ($t(17) = 3.57$, $p = .0031$), a student's sense of pressure, and feelings of sacrifice and distress (Beck & Davidson, 2013). A high level of collegiate stress is not predictive of degree completion. Currently, only 13.2% of the Hispanic students enrolled in a community college earn an associate's degree (Fry & Lopez, 2012). It is unclear to what extent factors such as social class, the role of family support, or

gender influence the persistence decisions of Hispanic students (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010). Moreover, contradictory findings have been reported regarding what influence, if any, involvement in student organizations and/or the campus climate on Hispanic students' persistence decisions (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora & Crisp, 2007).

Table 6

CPQ Factors by Race or Ethnicity: nonHispanic Caucasian

Caucasian	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Academic Integration	0.48	0.75	2.91	2.08	.0172	.13	.82
Academic Motivation	0.61	0.94	3.10	2.07	.0052	.20	1.02
Academic Efficacy	0.87	0.83	4.03	2.13	.0013	.40	1.32
Financial Strain	0.36	1.50	0.94	2.13	.3642	-.47	1.20
Social Integration	-0.13	1.09	-0.46	2.12	.6542	-.70	.45
Collegiate Stress	0.25	1.06	0.82	2.18	.4293	-.42	.92
Advising	0.25	0.97	0.90	2.18	.3889	-.36	.86
Degree Commitment	1.22	1.00	5.17	2.11	<.0001	.72	1.72
Institutional Commitment	0.83	1.40	2.06	2.18	.0642	.06	1.73
Scholastic Conscientiousness	1.1	0.88	3.97	2.23	.0032	.47	1.72

The nonHispanic Caucasian participants of this study demonstrated scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) on many factors associated with academic success and persistence: academic efficacy, academic integration, academic motivation, degree commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness (Table 6). However, the nonHispanic Caucasian participants did not have significant scores on several of the other CPQ factors associated with persistence: advising, institutional commitment, or social integration. Although working class or financially disadvantaged nonHispanic Caucasian students are challenged academically and socially in the

postsecondary environment, there has been limited research conducted on this population (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Lightweis, 2014; Thering, 2012). Moreover, Stuber (2011) reported postsecondary institutions classify this student population as a "racial majority and socioeconomic minority" (p. 120); consequently, the postsecondary persistence decisions of these students go unnoticed by administrators (Lightweis, 2014). According to Johnson et al. (2014), the stress associated with social difficulty or social integration has an indirect effect on nonHispanic Caucasian's persistence decisions (Bean & Eaton, 2000-2001). Coupled with a decrease in institutional commitment, this lack of social integration influences a nonHispanic Caucasian's academic success and persistence decisions by the end of the second year of college (Johnson et al., 2005).

Table 7

CPQ Factors by Race or Ethnicity: Multiracial

Multiracial	*M*	*SD*	Test statistic	Critical value	*p*	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Academic Integration	1.0	0.68	5.51	2.15	.0001	.61	1.39
Academic Motivation	0.81	1.17	2.78	2.12	.0139	-.19	1.43
Academic Efficacy	1.0	0.47	6.71	2.23	<.0001	.66	1.34
Financial Strain	-0.75	0.71	-3.00	2.31	.0199	-1.34	-.16
Social Integration	0.5	0.80	2.17	2.18	.0527	-.01	1.01
Collegiate Stress	0.75	1.16	1.82	2.31	.1114	-.22	1.72
Advising	0.88	0.83	2.97	2.31	.0210	.18	1.57
Degree Commitment	1.67	0.49	11.70	2.18	<.0001	1.35	1.97
Institutional Commitment	0.71	1.22	1.54	2.37	.1738	-.42	1.85
Scholastic Conscientiousness	1.25	0.46	7.64	2.31	.0001	.86	1.64

The Multiracial participants of this study demonstrated scores significant at the .05 levels, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) on several factors associated with academic success and persistence: academic efficacy, academic integration, academic motivation,

advising, degree commitment, and scholastic conscientiousness (Table 7). However, unlike the other study participants, the Multiracial participants reported scores significant at the .05 level, (e.g., a 95% confidence interval) in the CPQ factor measuring financial stress ($t(8) = -3.00$, $p = .0199$), a student's concerns over financial worries, as well as his/her perception of a financial disadvantage in relationship to others (Beck & Davidson, 2013). It is unclear what factors are influencing the financial strain in this student population.

Qualitative Results

Six scholarship recipients participated in the face-to-face personal interviews. Of the six interviewees, whose responses will be reported using pseudonyms, three were African American females, Angela, Christy, and Felicia; one was a nonHispanic Caucasian female, Dory; and two were African American males, Brad and Evan. A comparison of the demographic data indicated the six students who participated in the face-to-face interviews were a representative sample of the larger FMSP population because 66% were female, 33% were male, and 83% were African American. A saturation of data was noted during the preliminary analysis of the responses; therefore, the researcher did not continue attempting to locate additional interview participants (Creswell, 1998).

Interview data was analyzed to track response occurrences found in the participant transcripts for main themes, and was then coded according to those themes using a three-phase coding system (Nueman, 2000). During the initial phase of coding, the researcher performed an initial scan of the data, highlighting words or phrases used by the participants, identifying and linking the core themes to the purpose of the study. Next, the researcher connected emergent themes and found links in the data. In the final

phase, the researcher reviewed the data and then assigned participant excerpts that illustrated the research themes. A close review of the participant responses yielded the themes that captured the nature and the experience of the FMSP scholarship recipients. Many of these themes were linked to each other and therefore contributed to a broader picture of the student experience.

Qualitative data analysis. Data was analyzed through uncovering the emergent themes and their occurrences in the data. The analysis of the interviews contained 290 (N = 290) participant occurrences that were identified as relevant to the research questions and coded. These occurrences were coded into seven themes: barriers to persistence, 12.4% (n = 36), family support, 3.1% (n = 9), financial support, 8.6% (n = 25), mentoring, 15.8% (n = 46), persistence, 19.3% (n = 56), student advocacy, 19.3% (n = 56), and student engagement, 20.3% (n = 59). There was significant overlap of participant responses noted within the themes, confounding the researcher's ability to posit a main theme(s) that contributed to the study participants' persistence decisions. To understand the student experience better, mentoring and student engagement were divided into subcategories and analyzed. When the response occurrences associated with the theme of mentoring were analyzed individually, a clearer picture emerged. Mentoring represented 15.8% (n = 46) of the total responses coded as a primary contributor to college success. However, when the subcategories of mentoring were reviewed, it appeared to be the idea of mentoring, which comprised 58.6% (n = 27) of the responses, rather than the actual mentoring experience that was contributing to postsecondary persistence decisions. Additionally, the students seemed to perceive the role of the high school mentor, 36.9% (n = 17), as more important than the role of the college mentor, 4.3% (n = 2). Additionally, student engagement, 20.3% (n = 59), was another factor in

college persistence and success. The student engagement theme was analyzed to discover if the role of student engagement differed between FMSP and the college. Upon review, students referred to FMSP 69.95% (n = 41), in comparison to the 30.5% (n = 18) of the students who also included the college in the role of student engagement in persistence.

Student responses were reviewed for cross-coding relationships also to determine if there were any connections or relationships between mentoring and persistence, financial support and persistence, student advocacy and persistence, student engagement and persistence, mentoring and student advocacy, and barriers to persistence that the researcher had not identified. A review of mentoring responses (n = 17) and persistence responses (n = 11) did not demonstrate a strong overlap, indicating the study participants do not recognize mentoring itself as a primary factor in persistence. However, financial support (n = 4) does appear to be a factor in the persistence decisions of the program participants. A stronger overlap was noted in the areas of student advocacy responses (n = 43) and persistence responses (n = 23), as well as student engagement (FMSP) responses (n = 61) and persistence responses (n = 52). However, the strongest overlap was noted between the areas of student advocacy and student engagement, where, of the 290 coded student responses, there was an overlap of 192 responses (66%). In regards to student perceptions of barriers to persistence (n = 19), the main perception was a lack of college readiness (n = 12). It should be noted that the interview participants used many words interchangeably, not differentiating between the actual program, mentor, or student advocate in his/her individual responses.

Key Themes

Mentoring. Each student who was interviewed reported a positive idea of mentoring in relationship to his/her academic persistence and success in college, but

expressed a wide range of actual mentoring experiences. Nora and Crisp (2007) proposed a theoretical framework in which to conceptualize higher education mentoring by combining the theories of Cohen and Galbraith (1995); Levinson et al. (1978); Miller (2002); Roberts (2000); and Schockett and Haring-Hidore (1985) into four major domains: psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and the existence of a role model. Although participants' responses included examples of mentors providing psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, and the existence of a role model, none of the participant responses indicated that their mentors provided academic subject knowledge support or helped them learn and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for academic success (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

To understand the student's perception of the role of mentoring and academic persistence and success better, this theme was subcoded into the following categories: high school mentoring, college mentoring, and the idea of mentoring. The responses were often more complementary towards the idea of mentoring rather than the actual mentoring relationship. This pattern was more evident in regards to experiences with a college mentor. For example, when the researcher asked, "Would it be helpful to have a mentor at the college level?" Angela, an African American female responded, "Umm…it depends. They could help with transition after college, internships, and into the work environment." Yet, when this same participant was asked, "As a woman participating in this scholarship program, what have you found to be the most useful to your academic success?" she replied, "Well, how they match you with a mentor. You have someone else there pushing you on and making sure that you finish your education. Mentors are important." Although Angela provided seemingly contradictory responses, she

understands how a mentor can provide degree and career support by helping students assess their academic and career goals, as well as helping learn problem-solving skills (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

This pattern of conflicting, but supportive responses, was noted throughout all of the individual interviews to the question, "Would it be helpful to have a mentor at the college level?" Brad, an African American male, responded, "It would. Judging from the mentor I have, he has helped me become the person that I am now." His response supports that he benefited from the existence of a role model who helped him learn and grow (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Christy, an African American female, replied, "Yeah, but they (the mentor) could understand me better if I could have the same mentor from ninth grade through college." Dory, a Caucasian female, explained, "I have had lots of mentors. I am still in contact with two of my three mentors. And I guess the student advocate is like my mentor." Dory continued, "It would be helpful to have people who could be there and available for me. Sometimes I would rather have that (mentors) than the extra money coming in, in addition to someone to help me learn to save money."

Evan, a young African American male, emphasized, "Yeah, I think everyone needs a mentor in college, having someone help you. Everyone gets stressed. No one should have to go to college by themselves." Alicia, an African American female, concurred, stating,

> Extremely. I guess the reason being is that college is hard, and as you know, college students don't make the best decisions. It is nice to have someone to talk to about school and personal problems. I am a stressor, so it is good to have someone who says, 'calm down, take a walk, you can do it.'

Both Evan and Alicia illustrated how the mentor could provide psychological and emotional support by creating a supportive relationship through emotional and moral

encouragement, listening, and identifying problems (Nora & Crisp, 2007). However, Felicia went on to describe an experience that is common to FMSP participants.

> I'm still in contact with one of them (mentor). I had one (mentor) in the eighth grade and then when I went to high school she did not want to transfer with me. I still keep in contact with the mentor that I got in the 10th grade. I got a new mentor last year, but she moved when her husband transferred out of state. She really helped me with a paper and stuff. We have lost touch.

Student advocacy. Every student interviewed reported a strong positive perception of the role of the student advocate in his/her college success and academic persistence. Regardless of the interview question asked, the program participants frequently tied the question to the positive role the student advocate had played in his/her initial and continuing college success. Study participants' responses confirmed the role of student support services, such as advising, academic counseling, and student tutoring as components of successful postsecondary academic and social integration (Bean, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2006). When asked, "How has having a student advocate enhanced your transition from high school graduate to college student?" Angela, a young African American woman, emphasized,

> My advocate has helped me transform a lot. She helped me with my mentor. She has been there a lot for me since high school. She checked on grades–she is still checking on me. Even after I graduate I will keep in contact with her.

Brad stated, "I can summarize it best by the bond we have. We have an awesome bond. We can have a genuine conversation about anything. She is always supportive and motivating." Another participant, Felicia, reported, "It made the transition a lot easier and smoother. You felt like you had someone on your side. Unlike other college students who were thrown out there, you have a student advocate." Evan wanted the researcher to understand that "my advocate helped me, but didn't baby me. I now know what to do."

Program participants continued to report the importance of the student advocate in

many areas. When asked the question, "What, if any, were the barriers to college registration?" by the researcher, the study participants' responses focused on the assistance provided by the student advocate during the registration process. Christy replied, "She is always calling and checking on me. She actually pushed me to sign up." Dory confirmed this student's perception by responding,

> Luckily, the student advocate was there to help me. On one hand, it might seem like the student advocate spoon fed me, but I would have never gotten through without her. I would not have registered for school without the student advocate.

While Felicia reported,

> I had excellent help. You know how you have to file taxes? My file was flagged because of no taxes. My student advocate helped me; she is awesome. She is wonderful. Oh, my gosh, one problem was the initial fee. The scholarship does not cover that fee, but the student advocate covered that too.

Evan continued, "I asked the student advocate, and she has been helpful. If I have questions, I know who I can ask." In response to the researcher's question, "Would it be helpful to have a mentor at the college level?" Christy responded, "I have been through a lot of mentors; my high school mentors changed a lot. The student advocate has always been there though." Dory reported, "The student advocate is like my mentor." When asked if "any particular experience stands out?" Felicia stated, "I guess the work of the student advocate stands out to me the most. Like being able to jump out of the gate, she is always available." Christy summed up what seemed to be the general perception of the interviewees, "I would not have registered for school if not for her (student advocate)."

Persistence. Every student who was interviewed reported that participation in the scholarship program contributed to his/her academic persistence and college success. When the researcher asked the participants, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" Angela responded,

> I would just like to thank all of the sponsors of the program, the CEO, all of the people who made the scholarship possible. It has allowed people like me to go to college, people who wondered how they could afford college. Scholarships, any scholarships are a blessing.

Brad stated, "Basically, I feel like the start is important and determines the finish. I had a good start. It was smooth. It has been awesome." Christy reported, "They pay for my schooling. It is an opportunity that I cannot miss. It is actually exciting and a blessing that I received this scholarship. Not many people receive scholarships. I am really blessed." Dory emphasized, "From FMSP it is the fact of the money. When I think FMSP, I think full tuition paid …boom! Next, it is the advocates; mentors are on top of you making sure you are using the investment wisely, but mostly the money." Felicia, reported,

> Well, to me in my situation, it is the financial help, so you don't have to focus on that. It is free, well not totally free, but it motivates you to do the best that you can, keep your grades you. For me, the biggest thing is they keep on pushing (you).

Evan, a reserved young man, was passionate in his response to this question.

> Basically, I just want to say that the people in the program are just great people. They (FMSP) just want to help you and take the burden of paying away. In college, you have to learn to prioritize. They (FMSP) will help you. They (FMSP) just know when we need help. I don't know how. They just know. They check on you constantly and look out for you. I love this program. I wish everyone could get a scholarship and have this support.

Barriers to college persistence. Although the study participants reported several barriers to college persistence, two themes reoccurred: transitioning from high school to college and a lack of college preparedness. All of the participants interviewed discussed varying degrees of difficulty transitioning from high school to college. When the researcher asked, "What, if any, were the barriers to successfully navigating the college admission and registration process independently?" Angela stated, "One of the barriers was trying to enroll the first time. It was overwhelming. My scholarship paid for classes,

I had to call the student advocate to pay for my books, and she did." Christy agreed, reporting, "It was hard at first. I needed help." Dory concurred, "Getting the proper documentation to register for college was hard." While Brad noted, "The only barrier was getting all of my paperwork together." Brad continued, "The only academic challenge is maybe paying. I make As and Bs. The computer lab has been beneficial. My laptop at home is not reliable, but the computer lab is always reliable." On the other hand, Felicia stated, "I had excellent help. The student advocate helped me. She is wonderful." A perception shared by Evan, "I asked the student advocate. She has been helpful." Dory reported, "A lack of family support has been a big challenge. Transportation has been a challenge, but luckily the student advocate and the mentors have been there to help me." When the researcher asked about academic challenges, Dory noted, "It is hard to stay passionate, so I am ignoring that feeling because I don't want to let everyone down. I know I will feel accomplished when I'm finished."

Another barrier to college persistence reported by these scholarship recipients was a perception that they were unprepared for the academic demands of college. Christy noted, "I felt overwhelmed my first semester, and the pace is so much different from high school." A sentiment also expressed by Evan,

> In high school, they baby you. My advocate helped me, but didn't baby me. I now know what to do. I don't care what they say, high school does not prepare you for college, and I took AP and Honors classes.

Evan continued,

> Math has been a challenge. I have really been good at math. I had to change in college, and not stress out because I got a C. It was not okay for me to get a "c" in a class, but it's okay now.

Felicia reported, "I would say school as a whole; getting assignments in on time. This is not like high school. They are not going to hold your hand. And I guess, knowing when

to ask for help."

When asked if he had any additional questions, the researcher might not have considered, Evan replied,

> I think FMSP should make high school more like college that would help the graduation rate in college. I think that they (FMSP) should help (students) learn deadlines, and to learn in college classwork means nothing; homework and tests are everything.

Factors that promote persistence. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), a strong positive relationship with an academic advisor, faculty member, or administrator who can help the student learn to navigate the academic and social systems successfully is not only the happiest student, but also the one most likely to persist. Study participants' responses noted several themes that promoted college attendance and persistence. However, two main themes were recurrent: the actual scholarship and the organizational support provided to the student though selection as a FSMP scholarship recipient. In regards to the study participants' perception of the impact of receiving the FMSP scholarship in relationship to persistence, Angela stated,

> It (the scholarship) meant a lot to me actually. I was overjoyed to receive it (the scholarship). I use the scholarship as I am supposed to. I buy books; pay for classes, and I get good grades. I was determined to go to college, and this has helped my family.

Brad noted,

> Receiving the scholarship has allowed me to achieve them (my dreams). I was uneasy about the direction to go. It has been amazing and has opened my eyes up to what I can obtain intellectually and job-wise. I love learning.

Christy continued, "I don't have to take loans. It makes me want to go further in school because I don't have to pay bills." Dory discussed, 'Well, I didn't really consider college. I didn't think it was possible. I did not understand that the scholarship would pay for everything. It (the scholarship) gave me freedom. It has been great."

While Evan explained,

> Basically, in high school, I did not know how I was going to pay for college, so I was just going to get a certificate. So now, I can pursue my goals and get an IT degree. …The amount of help that they (FMSP) give you is amazing. They (FMSP) told me that I could take my time. They (FMSP) said to take what I can handle, even if it was only two or three classes. They (FMSP) are still behind you. They (FMSP) tell you that you are not going to lose the scholarship.

Felicia said, "Well, it is making college actually possible. Without the program, I wouldn't be able to go. The scholarship made school a realistic goal for me." Felicia continued this theme when the researcher asked her, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" She replied,

> Well, to me in my situation, it is the financial help, so you don't have to focus on that. It is free, well not totally free, but it motivates you to do the best you can, keep your grades up.

Additionally, all of the study participants perceived that organizational support was a factor in continued college persistence. When the researcher asked, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic success?" Angela replied, "I think just having a support system, everyone cheering me on, family, student advocate, mentor, and friends. They all wanted me to finish." Brad continued, "The academic support that I have received has been amazing. The student advocate told me, 'Now that you've done this, you can move on and conquer the world.'" Christi explained, "Actually having mentors there to coach you and keep you on track." Dory expressed,

> One thing that comes to mind is a lot of people speaking to me and believing in me instills that belief in myself. They see potential in me. I'm not saying that I am doing it to please others, but it helps.

Evan responded to the researcher,

> The fact that they (FMSP) are behind you so much. They (FMSP) push you, and take time with you. I think that them (FMSP) paying for it (tuition) helps because they (FMSP) say, "Don't stress about how you're going to pay. Just do the work." They (FMSP) really care about your work.

While Felicia noted,

> Using them (FMSP) as a resource. If I can't get something done, I can go to the student advocate and she will help me get it done. Like if I need tutoring, she will arrange for them to provide a wonderful academic resource.

Brad responded to this question by saying, "I think a question that should be asked is 'Where would you be without this scholarship? To be honest, I don't think I would be this far in school, if I had gone at all."

Summary

The findings discussed in this chapter were developed by thoroughly analyzing the data provided by the study participant responses to the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) and the face-to-face interviews. The comparison of the data from the CPQ and the personal interviews align with the FMSP concept that mentoring and student advocacy increase the postsecondary persistence of the scholarship recipients. The College Persistence Questionnaire results and the thematic findings presented are important because they may help FMSP develop and implement strategies that will increase the college graduation rates of program participants. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study results, interpretations, and limitations, and also offers implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary

It is increasingly difficult to find employment without some type of postsecondary education or training (Achieve, 2010). Postsecondary persistence is a dynamic process dependent upon a student's background factors including economic class, family, race/ethnicity, and gender. Tinto's (1975) Theory of Social Integration and Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement have provided the theoretical foundations for much of the current retention research (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Evolving over time, Tinto's (1975) Student Retention Model has provided the foundational guidelines to postsecondary institutions developing effective retention programs (Barefoot, 2004; Caison, 2005; Conner et al., 2013; Hartley, 2011; Leppel, 2002; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). According to Tinto (1987), a student's social and academic integration contributes to student persistence. Consequently, strengthening mentoring and student advocacy programs could influence a young adult's decision to pursue postsecondary education (Mangold et al., 2003). Although student support services such as mentoring and advocacy appear to yield positive returns in terms of human capital investment, it is important to understand the role of human capital theory, mentoring, and advocacy on college success and perseverance. Specifically, this information would provide valuable knowledge whether continuation of postsecondary mentoring and student advocacy is warranted. Further, it is important to understand what, or if, any of the persistence factors influence the persistence decisions of the FMSP scholarship recipients.

This mixed methods study investigated what, if any, factors contributed to the

college persistence decisions of a specific group of scholarship recipients who were attending a state college system in Northeast Florida during the spring term of 2014. The study results were based on the responses of a small cohort of FMSP participants who participated anonymously in the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ), face-to-face personal interviews conducted by the researcher, or both. The purpose of the study was to determine if the continuation of support services, i.e., student advocacy and mentoring, would increase college graduation rates of the program's scholarship recipients. Participant data collected from the College Persistence Questionnaire and the face-to-face interviews were coded and analyzed to comprise the research results. This final chapter includes a discussion of the research implications, limitations, and recommendations based on the study results, as well as suggests recommendations for future research.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study support that the Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program should consider implementing an organizational success strategy of providing student support services to all scholarship recipients the first semester of postsecondary education. Further, the results of the study suggest that the FMSP should consider developing an ongoing evaluative process to determine which scholarship recipients would benefit from ongoing postsecondary student support services. FMSP should strengthen the organizational focus on college readiness in the high school program participants, specifically encouraging the students to enroll in advanced and Advanced Placement courses. Further, FMSP should consider the implementation of a mentor-training program that could augment the academic support and guidance currently provided by the student advocates. Finally, the study results suggest that Florida Mentoring Scholarship program should consider and develop success strategies that

target the specific geographic, gender, racial, and ethnic differences and needs of the scholarship recipients.

Factors That Facilitate Persistence

Student advocacy/mentoring. Many researchers have documented the positive role of mentoring in academic success and retention (Crisp, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Mangold et al., 2003; Masten & Reed, 2002; Rhodes & DuBois, 2004). According to Nora and Crisp (2007), the most effective mentoring programs provide a combination of emotional support, goal support, career development, and academic subject support. Crisp (2009) defined mentoring as

> Support provided to college students that entails emotional and psychological guidance and support, help succeeding in academic coursework, assistance examining and selecting degree and career options, and the presence of a role model by which the student can learn from and copy their behaviors relative to college going. (p. 189)

Using Crisp's (2009) definition of mentoring, FMSP student advocates act as effective mentors and follow the guidelines suggested by Nora and Crisp (2007). Therefore, while the CPQ data results support the value of advising, $t(93) = 11.175$, $p = < .0001$ to the study participants; due to the wraparound services provided by the organization, it is unclear about whether the study participants actually differentiated between the student advocate, mentor, the FMSP organization, or postsecondary institution when responding to the CPQ questionnaire. Additionally, the study participants did not seem to differentiate between the program and the program representative. An illustration of this conclusion was evidenced when an FMSP state director shared a phone call she had made to a scholarship participant when she was a local program director. She told the researcher, "The person who answered the phone told the program participant, 'Your scholarship (FMSP representative) is on the phone,'" (A.

Taylor, personal communication, February 17, 2015).

Due to the comprehensive services provided to the scholarship recipients, the student-focused mission, and the strong organizational branding, the study participants actively verbalized the importance of having a mentor. However, interview responses suggest that the students do not differentiate or understand the organizational role of mentors, student advocates, and the organization itself, but consider these roles interchangeable. Based upon the analysis of the study participant responses, and to help clarify the study participants' experience, mentoring was subcoded into the following categories: high school mentoring (36.9%), college mentoring (4.3%), and the idea of mentoring (58%). The participant responses were more complementary towards the idea of mentoring rather than the actual mentoring relationship, especially in regards to a college mentor. Evan explained, "Yeah, everyone needs a mentor in college, having someone to help you. Everyone gets stressed. No one should have to go to college by themselves." However, specific response occurrences referenced the participant's middle/high school mentor (n = 17). Further, while the scholarship recipients reported they thought the idea of a mentor was important for college success, they overwhelmingly reported the student advocate helped navigate the transition process between high school and college. All of the interview participants reported having confidence in the reliability and dependability of the student advocate. When Evan was asked, "How has involvement in this scholarship program influenced your academic achievement?" he explained,

> It (FMSP) has helped a lot. You have support everywhere. Like I didn't pass college algebra, and the student advocate went with me, and we figured out how I can still get my A.A. and transfer to a university.

Organizationally, FMSP has developed a comprehensive set of overlapping

services: administrative, volunteer mentoring, and student advocacy. One of the principal services offered to the scholarship recipients is a student advocate who provides academic caring, helping students set and attain reasonable academic expectations, as well as providing personal caring, or the willingness to listen and taking interest in scholarship recipients' lives (Woolfolk, Hoy, & Weinstein, 2006). Ender and Willkie (2000) noted, "It is important that advisors provide the unprepared student with positive and encouraging feedback when appropriate" (p. 135). Given the effectiveness of these services at the high school level, Woolfolk, Hoy, and Weinstein (2006) suggested that continuation of these services at the college level might help student achievement.

Academic efficacy/scholastic consciousness. A student's confidence in his/her academic abilities and the potential outcomes combined with his/her ability to complete the academic requirements in a timely manner are paramount for academic success (Beck & Davidson, 2013); students with higher GPA measurements have higher postsecondary persistence rates (Caldwell & Siwatu, 2003; Klepfer & Hull, 2012; Tyler & Boeltor, 2008). Therefore, the results of the academic efficacy and scholastic conscientiousness will be examined together. First, the data indicates that, overall, the study participants, $t(119) = 6.942$, $p = <.0001$ self-reported confidence in his/her academic efficacy, i.e., abilities, as well as his/her scholastic conscientiousness, $t(87) = 8.523$, $p = <.0001$. However, the results of the CPQ data analysis were not reflected in the personal interview responses.

Study participants reported a lack of academic preparedness and/or confidence, as well as concern over their ability to complete academic requirements in a timely manner. Angela reported, "First year is culture shock; this is not high school. Most professors will not accept late papers." Christy concurred stating, "I felt overwhelmed my first semester,

and the pace is much different than high school." When asked, 'How do you think your involvement in this scholarship program has influenced your academic achievement?" Dory replied,

> Right now, my grades are not too good. When they (FMSP) look at my grades they (FMSP) can say, "What's the problem?" and they (FMSP) step in. They (FMSP) encourage me to ask if I can re-take (an exam) or if I need a tutor, like with math.

When the researcher asked about suggestions for FMSP, Evan reported,

> I think they (FMSP) should make high school more like college. That would help the graduation rate in college. I think that they (FMSP) should help (students) learn deadlines. And to learn in college, classwork means nothing. Homework and tests are everything.

Felicia noted when asked about academic challenges, "I would say school as a whole; getting assignment in on time. This is not like high school. They are not going to hold your hand. And I guess, knowing when to ask for help." The interview participants expressed perceiving that they were not academically prepared for the rigor of college level work. Further, the students reported a lack of the self-discipline or the appropriate academic tools necessary to be successful in the college environment. However, the participants did report that they became familiar and utilized academic support services such as tutoring to improve academic success.

Academic motivation. Guiffrida (2006) suggested that a student's motivational orientation should also be considered in relationship to Tinto's model. When the academic motivation factor of the CPQ was analyzed, the overall results $t(189) = 4.759$, $p = <.0001$ are statistically significant suggesting that the study participants enjoy learning and are willing to devote time and energy to learning. However, this trend was not noted in the Hispanic, $t(19) = -1.189$, $p = .2492$, or the male participants of any of the ethnic groups, $t(60) = 1.963$, $p = .0543$. Self Determination Theory (SDT) proposed that

students have one of two educational motivation orientations, intrinsic or extrinsic. For example, intrinsic motivation occurs when students are learning because they find the knowledge interesting, while extrinsic motivation is noted when students are learning for a specific purpose; e.g., to get a good job (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Guiffrida, 2006). Current Self Determination Theory supports the premise that intrinsic, not extrinsic motivation is associated with successful and continued learning, i.e., persistence (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Guiffrida, 2006). A review of the personal interview responses indicated that primary motivation orientation of the study participants was intrinsic. According to Deci and Ryan (1991) and Reeve, Deci, and Ryan (2004), intrinsic motivation has three components: (a) autonomy, i.e., the student chooses to engage in learning; (b) competence, i.e., the student wants to be tested and challenged; and (c) relatedness, i.e., the establishment of close relationships. Conversely, there are three types of extrinsic motivation: (a) external regulation, i.e., rewards and punishments; (b) interjected regulation, i.e., when a student begins to internalize the pressure to learn; and (c) identified regulation, i.e., when a student has internalized the pressure to learn (Reeve et al., 2004).

All of the responses coded as academic motivation supported one of the components found in an intrinsic motivation orientation, while none of the responses indicated an extrinsic motivation orientation. Angela illustrated the autonomy component when she stated, “I was determined to go to college, and this (scholarship) has helped my family.” Brad laughed as he reported, “I love learning and have friends that tease me–if there is anything that I don’t know, I’ll look it up.” Evan gave an example of the competence component, telling the researcher,

I thought that I would blow through college. Failing math made me change my

> thinking. I learned to chill out and to think, how am I going to pass math? I thought that I needed to find an easy way out, and you find there is no easy way out. Failing math class really changed my thinking. The posters are off the wall, and the calendars are up. My bedroom looks like a classroom.

However, all six personal interview participants' (Angela, Brad, Christy, Dory, Evan, and Felicia) interview responses were indicative of the relatedness component of an intrinsic motivation (Reeve et al., 2004). Given the consistent theme noted in the participant responses, his/her cultural background and values might be influential in persistence decisions. For example, when asked, "How do you think that your involvement in this scholarship program has influenced your academic achievement?" Angela responded,

> I just really like how the whole program is designed to help under-privileged children like me to finish. The design to have mentors and a student advocate to still help you after you graduate and send new-letters showing other recipients you have graduated.

When the researcher asked, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" Evan gave an example of the relatedness component, "The fact that they (FMSP) are behind you so much. They (FMSP) push you, and take time with you. … They (FMSP) really care about your education." Brad noted, "We (participant and student advocate) can have a genuine conversation about anything that transitions to the scholar level. She is always supportive and motivating." When the researcher asked Brad, "What have you found to be most helpful to your academic success?" he responded,

> The most useful part I would say would be my mentor. Just anything my heart desires–if I need information or help that is not always related to school, he (mentor) helps with problem solving. He (mentor) is always there.

When Christy was asked, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" she replied, "They (FMSP) pay for my schooling. It is an opportunity that I

cannot miss." In addition, Dory noted,

> You know as time goes on you lose interest in school. It's hard to say that to people who have invested so much in me. It's hard to keep passionate, so I am ignoring that feeling because I don't want to let everyone down. I know I will feel accomplished when I'm finished.

An examination of Guiffrida's (2006) model suggested a student's cultural background, i.e., individualist or collectivist cultural norms, has the potential to affect motivational orientation. While Tinto's theory emphasized the need for a student to separate from his/her family and community, Guiffrida (2006) proposed that maintaining strong relationships with family and community might positively impact a student's motivational orientation. Researchers (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Bordes, Sand, Arredondo, Robinson-Kurpius, & Rayle, 2006; Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson-Kurpius, & Rund, 2011; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005*;* Feliciano, 2012; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005*)* have reported that female and low-income students may navigate postsecondary education more successfully with the social capitol provided by family, friends, community, and faculty. Because the Hispanic participants of this study demonstrated lower academic motivation, FMSP might pay special attention to the role of the family in this population. Ojeda, Navarro, and Morales (2011) reported that a supportive family is predictive of Hispanic persistence decisions, especially his/her mother (Espinoza-Herold, 2007). Strayhorn (2010) confirmed the role of parental support in Hispanic males' persistence decisions. While minority students might maintain a collectivist value set, Guiffrida (2006) cautioned against broadly categorizing all minority students as collectivist and all nonHispanic Caucasian students as individualist.

Financial strain. A lack of the economic capital needed to fund postsecondary education is often a barrier for low-income students; therefore, parental income is a

strong predictor of postsecondary persistence and academic success (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Strayhorn, 2010; Walpole, 2003). FMSP's early scholarship selection process and consistent student advocacy appears to have removed the financial barrier often associated with postsecondary persistence decisions within this group of scholarship recipients. When the researcher asked, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" Evan stressed,

> The fact they (FMSP) are behind you so much. They (FMSP) push you, and take time with you. I think that them (FMSP) paying for it (tuition) helps because they say, "Don't stress about how you're going to pay. Just do the work." They (FMSP) really care about your education.

Although the study participants appear to recognize financial strain as a factor and barrier to persistence, their confidence in the scholarship program removes this as a conscious consideration. This perception was consistent in both the interview responses and the CPQ financial strain factor results $t(64) = 0.88$, $p = .3803$. If a scholarship recipient needed extra financial assistance, then he/she would ask the student advocate. For example, Angela reported, "My scholarship paid for classes. I had to call the student advocate to pay for my books, and she did." Felicia also noted, "Oh, my gosh, one problem was the initial fee. The scholarship does not cover that fee, but the student advocate covered that too." Although typically identified as a barrier to persistence, the FMSP scholarship seems to have removed the stress of funding postsecondary education from the study participants allowing them to focus on academic achievement.

Social integration/student engagement. Tinto, in his theory of student departure (1993), posited that to experience college successfully and persist, students' needs to break his/her ties with prior connections and communities. However, numerous studies indicated the need for minority students to maintain cultural connections (Gonzalez,

2000; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Padilla, Gonzales, & Trevino, 1996), as well as family and community connections (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Delgado, 2002; Gloria, Robinson-Kupius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Gonzales, 2000; Guiffrida, 2004, 2005; Nora, 2001; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) also reported that family and community support had a positive influence on postsecondary persistence in minority populations, especially Hispanic populations. Consequently, Guiffrida (2006) proposed an expansion of Tinto's (1993) model that incorporated cultural norms, thus allowing researchers to understand the persistence decisions of diverse student populations. Due to the diverse population of FMSP, Guiffrida's (2006) model might offer better insight into the study results.

An analysis of the CPQ social integration factor supported the importance of a sense of belonging and similarity in the study participants, $t(140) = 3.930$, $p = .0001$. It is important to note that the strong social integration noted in study participants appears to be to the FMSP organization, family, and community, rather than the specific postsecondary institution. When the researcher asked Angela, "What have you found to be the most useful to academic persistence?" she went on to say, "I think just having a support system, everyone cheering me on. Mom, siblings, college advocate, mentor, friends, all want me to finish." Felicia concurred stating,

> I like the fact that it is family oriented. They (FMSP) try to include family as much as possible. I like that they (FMSP) take you into consideration and partner you with people who suit you. Like my last mentor, I was not strong in English. I'm getting better, and the student advocate partnered me with a lady who was an English major. I like that a lot.

Dory commented, "I have had a lot of moms." When asked, "What have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?" Dory replied,

> One thing that comes to mind is a lot of people speaking to me and believing in me instills that belief in myself. They (FMSP) see potential in me. I'm not saying that I am doing it to please others, but it helps.

When asked, "How do you think that your involvement in this scholarship program has influenced your academic achievement?' Felicia responded,

> Um…I believe that like I said, it (FMSP) helps out a lot. The reason being–it (FMSP) makes me want to do better, not only for myself, but also for them (FMSP). They (FMSP) see the best in me. I don't want to disappoint them (FMSP) and I definitely don't want to disappoint myself. So, I'm definitely going to strive for the best.

According to Beck and Davidson (2013), institutional commitment, or a student's loyalty and confidence in his/her postsecondary institution, is a factor in persistence. Although the study participants had significantly higher scores in institutional commitment, $t(92) = 6.52$, $p = <.0001$, the interview responses support the conclusion that the institutional commitment is to FMSP rather than the specific college. All of the study participants' personal interview responses shared recurrent themes of engagement, support, and belonging to FMSP. Angela verbalized strong loyalty and engagement with the FMSP organization. She told a story of loyalty and gratitude throughout her interview. Angela started the interview by stating,

> It meant a lot to me actually. I did not know that I would receive the scholarship, and I was in ninth grade. I was overjoyed to receive it. I use the scholarship as I am supposed to. I buy books; pay for classes, and I get good grades. I come from an underprivileged family, so we were overjoyed for me to receive the scholarship.

As the interview ended, the researcher asked Angela if she had anything else she would like to add about her participation in the scholarship program. Angela concluded the interview by saying,

> I would just like to thank all of the sponsors of the program, the CEO, all the people who made this scholarship possible. It has allowed people like me to go to college. People who wondered how they could afford college, scholarships, any

scholarships, are a blessing.

When asked the interview question, “Are there additional questions you would like me to ask about your participation in the scholarship program that I might have not considered?” Brad continued this theme by responding, “I think one of them would be, where would you be without the scholarship? To be honest, I don’t think I would be this far in school, if I had gone at all.” Brad ended the interview by stating, “It was the perfect start and helped set me on the right path. This (FMSP) made my transition to college easier.” Evan also reported a strong sense of loyalty and belonging to the FMSP. When the researcher asked, “Is there anything else you would like to add about your participation in the scholarship program?” Evan said,

> Basically, I just want to say the people in the program are just great people, They (FMSP) just want to help you and take the burden of paying away. In college, you have to learn to prioritize. They (FMSP) will help you. They (FMSP) just know when we need help. I don’t know how. They (FMSP) just know. They (FMSP) check on you constantly, and look out for you. I love this program. I wish everyone could get a scholarship and have this support.

Tinto (1993) and Guiffrida (2006) discussed that student integration is needed to persist; however, Guiffrida (2006) proposed adopting Kuh and Love’s (2000) use of the word *connection* instead of *integration*. Kuh and Love (2000) posited that the word integration implies the student needs to abandon his/her prior culture and support system, while connection supports the student becoming comfortable in the college setting without breaking ties with his/her prior culture of support system. Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program has created a model that allows the student to acclimate to the college environment, yet maintain an established support system using student advocates and mentors.

Limitations of the Study

This study has many identified limitations. This study was exploratory research confined to a small sample population. Moreover, the scholarship recipients invited to participant in the study were already classified as "persisting" by FMSP due to his/her enrollment status. Study participation was limited to FSMP scholarship recipients attending an institution in a specific State College System in Northeast Florida during the Spring 2014 term. As such, the findings might not generalize to either the entire population of FMSP or at-risk college students in general. Because the study was conducted over a course of a single semester, it might not accurately predict the long-term persistence patterns of these students because the data reflects a brief snapshot in time of a specific set of participants. While this snapshot will provide useful information, it can only provide a basis for future research on this population.

From a quantitative perspective, due to the small sample size, caution should be exercised in making program-wide generalizations of study results to a larger population. While this data might be generalizable to the students in northeast Florida, the inconsistency of program reporting county to county limits statewide generalization of program success strategies. Additionally, the College Persistence Questionnaire was delivered through an anonymous e-mail platform, which could have created a bias due to small sample size and nonresponse rate. However, the results of the quantitative data warrant further study with larger sample sizes.

The data collected was through self-reports, i.e., CPQ or face-to-face personal interviews; hence, not verifiable, as well as having the potential for subject bias. Although survey instruments or personal interview questions do not easily identify underlying attitudes or agendas, it still needs to be considered as a limitation when

discussing study findings or conclusions. The researcher designed the personal interview questions with the assistance of FMSP personnel; consequently, interview questions might be biased to positively reflect the program. Because face-to-face interviews were conducted, participant and interviewer bias could also be a factor in data collection and analysis.

Although not implied by the program or the researcher, some of the study participants might have perceived they had to present an overly positive opinion of the program because all of the study participants were still receiving scholarship monies. While the real or imagined pressure to participate in the study was not measured, this could have potentially affected participant responses. Not all scholarship recipients chose to participate in the study. Given the time commitment association with participation in the study, it should be considered that the scholarship recipients who did participate had were more invested in, or had a more favorable opinion of the program. Individual reasons or attitudes for participating in the study were not addressed. For example, even willing study participants might be hesitant to discuss negative concerns openly regarding the mentoring or student advocacy experience. The strong positive student perception of the student advocate could be based on this specific student advocate and might not be a program-wide representation. Additionally, this study only included the scholarship recipients and did not include the perspective of the program administrators or volunteer mentors.

Recommendations

Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program administrators have spent years developing effective intervention strategies to increase the high school graduation rates of at-risk students, ultimately reducing societal crime rates, substance abuse, and

generational poverty (TSIC, 2014). Because FMSP already appears to incorporate the three areas of organizational analysis recommended by Tinto (1987) and Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo (1996) to improve student retention at the high school level: (a) designing and implementing a comprehensive program model to improve retention, (b) facilitating behavioral changes necessary to improve retention, and (c) utilizing institutional research to understand the dynamics of at-risk students, expansion of the FMSP program to include postsecondary education would further the organizational mission and goals. The result of this exploratory research reflects many scholarship recipients would benefit from student advocacy services at the college level.

Current research supports that a student's high school academic background including course selection and GPA is strongly correlated with postsecondary academic persistence, consequently, FMSP might consider increasing program focus on college readiness (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011*;* Porchea et al., 2010). Increasing the focus on college preparedness would be especially beneficial because many students, including the scholarship recipients from FMSP, overestimate their level of college readiness (Amos, 2013; Bautsch, 2013). Postsecondary remedial classes alone do not provide at-risk students with the skill set needed to be successful in a college environment. Consequently, high schools and postsecondary institutions need to form partnerships to discuss and develop guidelines for college preparation instruction and the corresponding milestones to assess college readiness in the scholarship recipients. FMSP needs to identify and remediate student academics in high school before a program participant enters into a postsecondary education. An academic preparedness model could be accomplished by implementing a structured evaluation and remediation program in the 9th grade for program participants. Student advocates and mentors need to encourage and

support enrollment in more rigorous high school courses, especially mathematics (Klepfer & Hull, 2012). However, before FMSP can develop and implement organizational changes and strategies, administrators need to establish consistent definitions of such terms as *persistence* and *college readiness*.

Additionally, the administrators of the program might want to consider developing a volunteer college coaching program incorporating emotional and psychological support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge, and a role model (Nora & Crisp, 2007) to oversee the scholarship recipient's academic journey. One potential method would be for the student advocates to train the volunteer mentors in the college admission process, requirements, timelines, and scholarship opportunities. A lack of the continuation of the mentoring relationship in college is a limitation of the program. Based upon the personal interview results, FMSP could improve the establishment of lasting mentor relationships at the middle and high school level as well. According to A. Taylor (personal communication, February 19, 2015), exit survey results from program participant high school graduates indicated that 60% report a lasting and stable relationship with their mentors. On the other hand, the results of the exit survey indicated that 40% of the students did not experience a lasting and stable relationship with his/her mentor, a theme noted throughout the face-to-face interview process. Targeted training of the mentors might benefit the program by establishing a sense of purpose in the mentor, which in turn might increase the mentor retention rate. Further, a different skill set is needed to promote postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and matriculation, i.e., the mentor needs to know about the college process to be a consistent and valuable resource (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

The results of the study indicated that some of the program participants would

benefit from a continuation of student advocacy services through the first one to two years of college. Most students would benefit from a consistent and predictable relationship with his/her student advocate and mentor focusing on postsecondary attainment goals (Bean, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2006). However, not all scholarship recipients may need this extra support. Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program should develop an assessment process to help identify the student who would benefit from this continued organizational support. Currently, FMSP perceives a program participant's enrollment in a postsecondary institution as a success (A. Taylor, personal communication, September 5, 2014). One of the positive aspects of the FMSP scholarships is also problematic in regards to understanding and accurately measuring the college persistence rates of the scholarship recipients. FMSP allows students to keep their scholarships even if they do not enroll in at least one academic course for several semesters. In fact, a scholarship recipient is considered to be persisting until he/she does not enroll in at least one course after three semesters (A. Taylor, personal communication, September 5, 2014). Therefore, it is difficult to track the actual number of students persisting at any given time.

From an organizational perspective, FMSP would benefit from the development of standard guidelines and protocols regarding the different types of student support services offered: financial, academic, advising, social, and administrative. Additionally, the program participants would benefit from a clear differentiation between the organizational role of the student advocate and the volunteer mentor. Development and implementation of a method for transferring organizational wisdom to new student advocates and mentors would improve successful role transfers. It is recommended that FMSP explore the development of specific strategies to address the different needs

associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and/or first generation students (Todman-Da Graca, 2012). Finally, it is recommended that consider the creation of learning communities consisting of current and former scholarship recipients (Hotchkiss et al., 2006).

Future Research

Florida Mentoring Scholarship Program has focused on understanding the role of mentoring and student advocacy on improving high school and college graduation rates. Indeed, the results of this exploratory research warrant a continuation of this research to understand if the scholarship recipients would benefit from statewide expansion of the college advocacy program. Further, although the statistical analysis of the CPQ did not yield statistically different (CL 95%) findings between the males and females completing the questionnaire, further study in this area might offer different results. Additionally, FSMP should continue to explore the different success strategies that facilitate academic persistence in the scholarship recipients.

Self-efficacy has been proposed as a predictor of academic persistence. Bandura (1997) defined *self-efficacy* as an individual believing that he/she has the capability to implement and fulfill the course of action required to identify and handle situations that facilitate the achievement of a specific goal. Students who have confidence in their ability to learn and perform academic tasks persist in spite of encountering difficulties or obstacles. According to Dixon-Rayle, Arredondo, and Robinson-Kurpius (2005), educational self-efficacy had a positive relationship to self-esteem, personal and family valuing of education, while negatively relating to academic stress. Reynolds and Weigand (2010) studied resilience, academic motivation, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards the college environment, reporting resiliency was strongly related to self-

efficacy. Additional findings support that intrinsic motivation was related to self-efficacy. Moreover, students who were intrinsically motivated demonstrated a better ability to cope with stressful or adverse experiences (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009; Reynolds & Weigand, 2010). Consequently, FMSP should consider expanding research endeavors to explore the role of resilience and self-efficacy in relationship to the program scholarship recipients' academic persistence and success.

Conclusion

To strengthen the results of the study, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to better understand factors that might influence the college persistence decisions of the study participants, including the roles of mentoring and student advocacy. Upon analysis, the results of the quantitative (CPQ) and the qualitative (face-to face personal interviews) data were consistent. Data from both research methods corroborated the scholarship recipient's perception of program components that facilitated persistence, as well as barriers to academic success. The study data supports that student advocacy and mentoring are significant factors in college persistence decisions.

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Appendix
Personal Interview Questions

Personal Interview Questions

1. How has receiving this scholarship changed your educational goals?

2. What, if any, were the barriers to successfully navigating the college admission and registration process independently?

3. How has having a student advocate enhanced your transition from being a high school graduate to being a college student?

4. Are you still in contact with your mentor?

5. Would it be helpful to have a mentor at the college level?

6. What have been your academic challenges?

7. How would you describe the academic support you have or have not received?

8. As a woman/man participating in this scholarship program, what have you found to be the most useful to your academic success?

9. As a woman/man participating in this scholarship program, what have you found to be the most useful to your academic persistence?

10. How do you think your involvement in this scholarship program has influenced your academic achievement?

11. What, if any, experiences at this state college have contributed to your academic persistence?

12. Was there a time that you felt overwhelmed at this state college?

13. How did you successfully cope with this situation?

14. Describe your overall experiences as a scholarship recipient for this scholarship program.

15. Does any particular experience stand out for you?

16. Are there additional questions that you would like me to ask about your

participation in the scholarship program that I might not have considered?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add about your participation in the scholarship program?