FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS' PATHWAYS TO A BACCALAUREATE

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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August 2011

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The pathway to college for most low-income first-generation students can seem impracticable and impossible to achieve. This diverse population has caused much apprehension among educational administrators and practitioners about how to serve these students effectively. As an educational practitioner working with this population I am especially interested in uncovering the "state of affairs" regarding first-generation college students in general, and low income first generation students in particular, and how I might be a catalyst of positive and effective change as I serve them.

My synthesis reviews published literature that reveals the "state of affairs" regarding first generation students. I address the questions of: How are first generation and low income students defined in the literature? What kinds of complexities arise in this definition? In what kinds of postsecondary institutions do they typically enroll? What are the individual characteristics of and obstacles faced by these students?

In addition, my synthesis explores two contrasting models designed to promote student success in achieving their BA: (a) TRIO Student Support Services, a longstanding federal program that has made great efforts to support low income first-generation students

through a variety of support services including creating learning communities within the postsecondary culture as well as providing developmental education and workshops, and (b) the Achieve the Dream initiative, a bold new national effort within community colleges, that has been established to promote a culture of evidence and to refine efforts of obtaining measurable outcomes of student success. I also consider the research on the effectiveness of these programs and their proposed practices to date in enhancing the success of low-income first generation college students.

The challenge of this quest will be longstanding, and viewing its unique attributes will allow for many additional reflective interventions. As a student of Critical and Creative Thinking I have drawn on the many tools I learned. The process of defining the best practices will be an ongoing process, which is reflective of what I learned in my problem-based learning course. There is empowerment in the statement, “every problem has a solution.” Geared with that knowledge, it is up to the creativity of the individual facing the problem to establish what route of possible resolutions is best suited for him or her. This is the junction at which I aim to be an agency of change, giving students the opportunity to “realize their dreams.” by considering how they are currently thinking about how they might use the possible tools that they might have been given to attain their degree.

DEDICATION

For my son~

All my life's effects are to showing you that anything you could imagine in your thoughts could be a reality. Furthermore, knowledge is power, anything worth having is worth working hard to attain. Thanks for believing in me.

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My educational journey continues to teach me that my success is connected to a community of individuals who understand the necessity of the advancement of all humanity. At times it appears to be a difficult task finding those unique individuals who will take the time and care to nurture the needs of others, other than their own. However, "When the student is ready the teacher will appear." As a determined, committed, and eager student ready to maximize all the moments of my educational experiences, I was blessed with the opportunity of encountering the educational expertise of Dr. Lana Jackman who has been phenomenal in her care and guidance, encouraging me to attain my masters at UMB and supporting my synthesis project. I thank Dr. Tara Parker, and am amazed that although I did not have the privilege of meeting Dr. Parker in person, she dedicated her time (given she was involved in multiple projects) and educational expertise to supporting my synthesis project. Both Dr. Jackman and Dr. Parker were a Godsend given both of them have attained their doctorate in Education specifically the science of understanding and supporting First-Generation College Students.

My community of supportive inhabitants does not end there; the community in which I have strived to master my vocation of helping others has a host of supporters. I thank Lila Tocci, my colleague with whom I worked closely with at Roxbury Community Colleges. Thank you for your expertise as an English Teacher and editing my numerous chapters in the development of my synthesis. I thank Dr. Jean Shaddai, a Professor at Bronx Community College where I worked in the department in which she taught. Thank you for taking your time and care in reviewing my beginning process of my synthesis. I offer special thanks to her as she offered her support as she was working diligently on completing her doctorial

studies. I thank Margaret Bovill- Hawkins from Bunker Hill Community College, for her continuous consideration of my educational and vocational development. She was kind to be my subject for my case study during a challenging time of the completion of federal reports and her educational process of completing her doctoral studies.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to thank the individuals who were close to me as I was challenged with the peaks and valleys of my synthesis process. I would be remiss not to mention Dr. Carol Smith, the chairperson of my synthesis committee. Thank you for your dedication, firm and steady guidance. They say, "What doesn't kill you will make you strong." You helped me to think critically through the process of doing a research project. I thank you for the countless hours we spent to complete this project. This experience will never be forgotten. In fact, this experience has energized me for the next step of my educational journey. I thank Dr. Lawrence Blum, my reader who also supported my process. I especially thank you for agreeing to support my project really late in the process and with little notice you attended my oral presentation and dedicated your time this summer to support my goal to finish for August graduation.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE MULTIPLICITY OF FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

> Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree. And so the question is whether all of us -- as citizens, and as parents -- are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed?
>
> President Barack Obama '11

In his January 2011 State of the Union address, President Obama discussed the severity of the state of our economy and the future of our nation. The President's comments resonate to my core; I understand the nation's call to support our challenged students as they find their way to our nation's college campuses. Furthermore, my personal experience supports the President's sentiments that our nation's youth are not necessarily being prepared to tackle the challenge of succeeding in our postsecondary educational institutions and the fact that some of our youth entering college might be actually the first in their families to go beyond high school.

As a concerned citizen, in my life's works I continue to serve my community by making a contribution to families and children. As a teen mother, I strove to overcome my own challenges of poverty and discrimination that I faced within my community. Being young, a single parent, African American and on the welfare system did not present me as desirable within my community. I located my sense of purpose and determination within myself, which enabled me to work through the ills that plagued my environment and worked against my success. I understood the importance of self-empowerment, which made it possible for me to overcome my fears, and through that transformation I was able to do what no one else in my family had accomplished – attend and graduate from college. However, I did not do this alone, or without challenges and interruptions. Further, there were, in fact, many supports along the way. The old adage of "when a student is ready the teacher appears" speaks volumes to my growth and development.

The pivotal moment in which my interest in education crystallized was when I was in the fourth grade and I found that the principal of the school I attended in Queens, New York was an African-American woman. Through the role model of this educational practitioner I saw a first glimpse of what I wanted to be. I remember her demeanor, her confidence and her strength, but most of all; I remember her sensitivity and consideration for the well-being of all students. I was drawn to her and wanted to be like her: shaping, nurturing, and encouraging young people to discover their greatness. I was encouraged by her example of leadership. Her commitment to humanity also inspired me to want to make a difference by investing my skills and talents in helping others.

As a young mother at age 16, I wanted to obtain my education and to strive toward creating an opportunity for myself so I could make a difference within my nuclear family. Just six years prior to the birth of my son, I was shuffled around in the New York Foster Care system to being adopted as a ten years old in Queens, NY to an maturing Italian couple (former Catholic pastor and former nun who left the church to married). Although I struggled personally with understanding my ancestral displacement, I embraced the journey of my diverse family composition I inherited. My rich upbringing helped me to develop a deep appreciation of self and a love for humanity in general. The birth of my son heightened my motivation to locate my genius and establish myself as a positive role model for my son and within the community at large. These defining moments helped me to realize I needed to have the curiosity to face my fears and to allow myself to consider the process of my personal and professional development though the process of advancing my education. My journey to the University was not much thought out and I was clearly not academically or financially prepared. However I remained open to the encouragement of Barber Phalen my high school counselor. My high school counselor saw something in me I did not see in myself at the time and she encouraged me to reach higher. I pursued a degree in Human Resources and Family Sciences with an emphasis in Education at University of Nebraska/Lincoln. As a young lady with child, I was not sure how I would survive in my quest toward a degree.

Through obtaining my degree I have been inspired to be an agent of change in the development of others. I remain steadfast in supporting the identifiable needs of the families I serve and encouraging them to invest in their growth and development as progressive productive individuals within their communities and contemporary families. Therefore, the profound analytical assessment of our nation's leader re-charged me, motivating me to take a comprehensive and a redefined approach to being a catalyst of effective change -- visualizing myself as a purposeful philanthropist of human capital within the educational industry, striving to make education accessible to all, particularly those who are at-risk students seeking assistance. As the President stated,

> There was a time when finding a good job meant showing up at a nearby factory or a business downtown. You didn't always need a degree, and your competition was pretty much limited to your neighbors. If you worked hard, chances are you'd have a

> job for life, with a decent paycheck and good benefits and the occasional promotion. (Obama, 2011).

That world has changed; people are not easily able to find work in neighborhood businesses. To compete in the workforce individuals must be well trained and knowledgeable about their chosen industry to be considered for a position in today's fast-changing economy.

Therefore, an innovative society depends on having a proactive and adaptive college environment that has the sensitivity to embrace the complexity of today's students. The nation's institutions of higher learning have identified an emerging category of students who fit the Presidential description of at-risk youth who transition into struggling adults trying to compete within the workforce. These students are often first-generation students who in many cases are also low income and from ethnic minorities. Postsecondary educational institutions are interested in serving this diverse group of students who need supportive services if they are to persist and attain their degree and so colleges in part so they can retain their tuition and favorable retention statistics. Given the colleges' assessment of the need to maintain its students to achieve favorable graduation statistics, colleges have instituted programs such as the "First Year Experience" for all students and "Student Success Services" to assist students who might not have taken the traditional routes to attending postsecondary education.

As a mid-career professional, I am interested in applying my skills, talent, and leadership in higher education programs helping underrepresented populations complete their post-secondary degrees. My desire to work with first-generation college students was influenced by my own personal journey of attending a large educational institution and the many pitfalls I experienced. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to connect with Multi-Cultural Affairs a division of TRIO's Educational Opportunity Center at the University of Nebraska/Lincoln that provided educational development programming that helped me overcome my academic unpreparedness and equipped me with the necessary techniques and support to navigate through my educational challenges toward college completion.

I also realized my interest to serve students through my years of working with low-income and at-risk families who had limited opportunities due to a lack of exposure and ultimately a lack of skills. After first working directly with troubled youth, I gained experience collaborating with the families of at-risk youths to empower each member of the family to effectively achieve his or her goals. In recent years, I have worked extensively with students in several educational institutions in admissions, enrollment and support programs serving students' educational process. Currently, I am working at a non-profit agency that supports at-risk families who struggle to compete in the job market due to a lack of education and consequently becoming homeless. In working with families in these settings I have offered my expertise with providing programming that helps families to explore their vocational desires, and, in turn, I have been able to encourage some homeless individuals to consider advancing their skills by attending college or training programs in the hope that their investment in education would enable them to obtain a livelihood that could support their families without relying on government assistance.

My years of service working with disadvantaged families have inspired me to think more deeply about how I might serve them more effectively in educational and non-profit settings. I have had the privilege of working with many families from a variety of demographic and economic backgrounds, assisting them to access the resources necessary to aid their growth and development. These employment opportunities have led me to develop a stronger desire to support first-generation and underrepresented students. As I continue to serve these populations, I am profoundly concerned about how to effectively teach and guide first-generation college students through the continuously changing trends of higher education. In my experience of working with homeless families who accepted the challenge of attending college, it almost always seems that the most direct method of engaging these students is through a process of self-discovery—getting them to buy into the possibility they can and will succeed. My experience has shown me that families in crisis and students that come from these families are in most cases lacking the necessary economic and educational resources and the social exposure to enable them to tap into their creativity and exercise a formal process to explore a suitable vocation that will embrace their life's possibilities.

The purpose of my synthesis is to examine the literature of the current trends and practices of how colleges and universities are successfully serving first-generation college students. I will explore meaningful strategies that will permit college practitioners to support all students' educational development, with a specific emphasis on the support of first-generation college students.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature to find out what is currently known about the "state of affairs" regarding first generation students. I will address the following questions. How are first generation students defined in the literature? What kinds of complexities arise in this definition? In what kinds of postsecondary institutions do they typically enroll? What are the individual characteristics of first generation students? What are the needs of first generation college students in order to be successful? How likely are they to graduate with a BA or other advanced degree compared to non first-generation students? From my review, I conclude that first generation students are more likely to first enroll in 2-year community colleges than non-first generation students, and that they are much less likely to obtain a BA degree. Given that I think there are good reasons that many start with community colleges, this led me to want to look carefully at the programs that community colleges were developing to help promote their success.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature to find out more about how community colleges are currently addressing the needs of their first generation students. I consider the historical origin of the Community Colleges, the Achieving the Dream initiative and examine several models of "pathways to success" embodied in current TRIO Programming. Here my questions include: What are considered "best practices" in these programs? Are there competing approaches? How clear is existing data about the effectiveness of best practices? I also supplement my findings with my interview of a local community college administrator. In my interview I questioned her about what are best practices, obstacles to helping students, and the ways her own institutions measured "success."

Chapter 4 addresses my conclusions and next steps. I consider my current views on "best practices" integrating the findings of literature, my interview, and my own personal experiences. I also consider what I see as the strengths and limitations of current literature, and further questions that I would like to see explored. Finally, I consider what I have learned that would be of most value to me as I work with these students. My overall goal for my synthesis project is that it will effectively inform my personal understanding and desire to serve first generation college students at the highest level of excellence.

CHAPTER 2

STATE OF AFFAIRS

An emerging population of first-generation students has become a major phenomenon affecting enrollments in postsecondary institutions. This diverse population has caused much deliberation among educational administrators and practitioners about how to serve these students effectively. As a practitioner working with this population in other contexts, I am especially interested in uncovering the current "state of affairs" regarding this emerging population. My questions are: Who exactly are first-generation college students? What are their needs? How prepared are first-generation learners to accept the educational challenges of college? What are their graduation rates?

A large pool of literature addresses these issues using data from several National Center for Education Statistics longitudinal studies. The datasets were drawn from: (1) the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) which followed a representative national cohort starting in 1988 when they were in 8^{th} grade and continuing every two years until 1994, two years after they graduated from high school and then again in 2000; and (2) the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (1998) which collected data on a representative sample of all ages of students enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in 1989-90 (cohort 1) and another sample of students enrolled for the first time in 1995-96 (cohort 2); the first cohort was resurveyed in 1992 and 1994 to assess their progress in completing a degree; the second cohort was resurveyed in 1998 and 2000.

In reviewing this literature, I discovered this group of first-generation students was more varied (demographically) than I originally imagined. From a combination of the research and my professional service, I identified a subgroup of first-generation students who are labeled "low income first-generation students" whom I was particularly interested in learning more about. I was especially interested in learning about this sub-group of students' transformation while attending community colleges and how these students fared when transferring to a 4-year institution to obtain their BA degrees. This was because as a practitioner who is currently working directly with adults in the shelter system helping at-risk families, I am invested in serving my community by helping adult learners who are predominately "low-income first-generation students" and who would most likely consider advancing their education via attending a community college route, rather than starting with a 4-year college. I discovered the research supported the premise that this subgroup of individuals would most typically enroll in community colleges. The research reveals that first-generation student' rates of success in achieving a bachelor's degree in most cases are quite low, especially when they are low income and start at a community college. Thus, this prediction of failure amongst this population enforces the need for college administrators to re-examine their practices when the executive of the highest governmental office (President Obama) has acknowledged the need for improvement of student success.

In this chapter, I first review what I have learned about the current state of affairs regarding first-generation students more broadly and then low income first-generation students more specifically as their needs will form the backdrop of my problem solving efforts to help them better "achieve their dream." I identify specifically who are first-generation students, where are they enrolled, what are their demographic characteristics, and what are the identifiable barriers in relations to degree attainment along with the statistics of how first-generation students' performance compares to their non-first-generation counterparts in community college settings.

Who Are First-Generation Students?

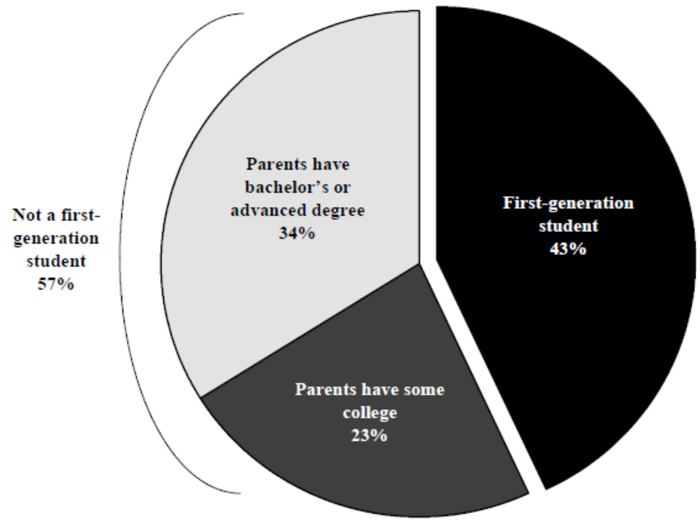
Understanding who first-generation students are is the first stage of understanding how to support these students. In my service to first-generation and underserved students, I have observed them often-facing unique challenges in their quest to attain a college degree, such as conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support. As a practitioner of student support, I have seen differences among students in maturity, financial needs, educational awareness and overall commitment to achieving their college degrees upon their initial enrollment and matriculating in college. I have witnessed first-generation students of various levels of resilience ranging from recent high school graduates to maturing adults, who have demonstrated their desire to succeed by displaying their self-determination and poise in spite of the many educational obstacles to creating and exploring their new educational opportunities due to their family's lack of education.

Overview of All First Generation Students

Understanding how first-generation students are defined is essential to estimating the percentage of such students. Darling and Smith (2002, p. 203) note "the term 'first-generation student' has taken on more than one meaning in current research." They define a first-generation college student simply as "an undergraduate student whose parents have no college experience," and the majority of research has adopted this definition as well. However, an alternative definition, used for example by the TRIO programs, is that first generation students are ones whose parents have not graduated from college. The latter definition is more inclusive, as it includes both students whose parents have never attended college and those who attended but did not graduate. For the purpose of this synthesis, the definition of first-generation student will be the same as is defined by the TRIO Student Support Services program. That is, the target group of students will be considered first-generation students if neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree and or if students' parents attended college but did not graduate Both groups of students are eligible participants of the TRIO's program (especially when accompanied by low income status) and are deemed underserved and at greater risk. Therefore, TRIO's identified group of students resonates as similar to the group of students I serve and I am motivated to learn best practices to serving this population in attaining their bachelor's degree.

How many postsecondary students are first-generation college students according to either of these two definitions? The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) examined a cross section of all postsecondary students in 1989-90. The research used three categories to organize their data: (1) students whose parents' highest level of education achievement was a high school diploma or less and who had no collected experience (which they identified as first-generation students); (2) students whose parents attempted to attend postsecondary education and did not attain a BA (a middle grouping of students that are included as first-generation according to TRIO program classifications); (3) students whose parents attained an BA or higher (grouped as non-first-generation students in all definitions) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students according to first-generation status



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998 (p.8).

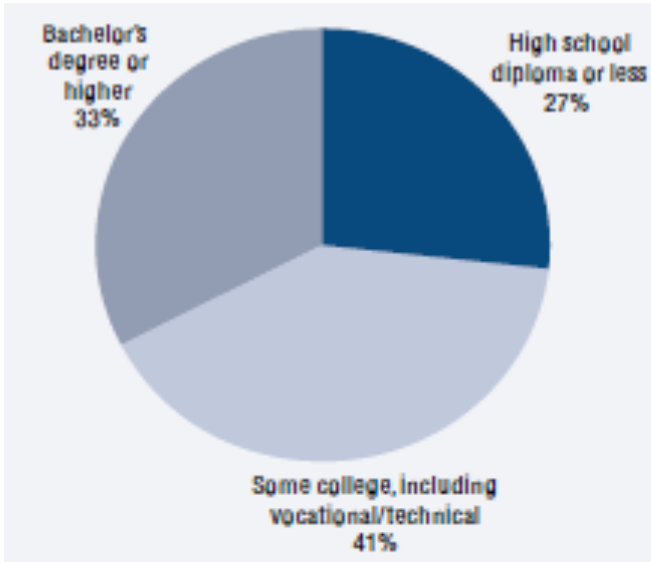
The study found that a total of 43 percent of students entering into postsecondary education in 1989-90 had parents who had no exposure to education beyond high school, 23 percent had a parent who entered college but did not attain a BA, and 34 percent had parents who attained a BA or higher. Furthermore, using the more inclusive definition of first-generation student and combining the first two groups (first-generation and students who parents who had some college) 66 percent of students would be considered first-generation students. Clearly first-generation students by either definition represent a large group of postsecondary students.

In another survey of all postsecondary students done six years later in 1995-96, the breakdown remained essentially the same: 47 percent of the sample of postsecondary students had parents with high school or less, 19 percent had parents with some college, and 34 percent had parents who had a BA or higher (Choy, 2001).

Choy (2001) in her literature review also considers data on the percent of first generation students within one cohort of high school students who were followed in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS, 1988/1998) starting when they were 8th graders in 1988. This research also used three categories to organize their data: (1) students whose parents had a high school diploma or less, (2) students whose parents had some college, which could include vocational/technical training, and (3) students whose parents attained a BA or higher. The statistics amongst 1992 graduates show that 27 percent had families in which neither parent had any college experience, 41 percent were in the middle group in which parents had attended but not graduated, and 33 percent had parents who had a BA (see Figure 2). Although this data shows a smaller percentage of students who were first generation by the more restrictive criterion, it only sampled one age cohort and was not a sample of all postsecondary students enrolling for the first time in any given year (which includes students of different ages). Further, when the more inclusive criteria are considered, the percentage of first generation students (68%) is very similar to the other studies.

All of these longitudinal studies show there are a large number of first-generation students. Darling and Smith (2002) state it is unclear the exact figure of students that fit into the first-generation category, but it is estimated at between 31 and 45 percent (for a more restrictive definition), and between 66 percent or as high as 68 percent for the more inclusive definition; both estimates confirm a high rate of first-generations college students who enroll in postsecondary education.

Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of 1992 High School Graduates According To Parents' Highest Level of Education



SOURCE: Department of Education, NCES, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 Eighth Graders, Choy, 2001 (p.5).

Figures 1 and 2 show samples of first-generation enrollment status across *all* postsecondary institutions. Yet, to better focus on the numbers of first-generation college students that enroll in community college, the question is posed: What does the statistical data reveal about the ratio of first generation students enrollment for different institutions?

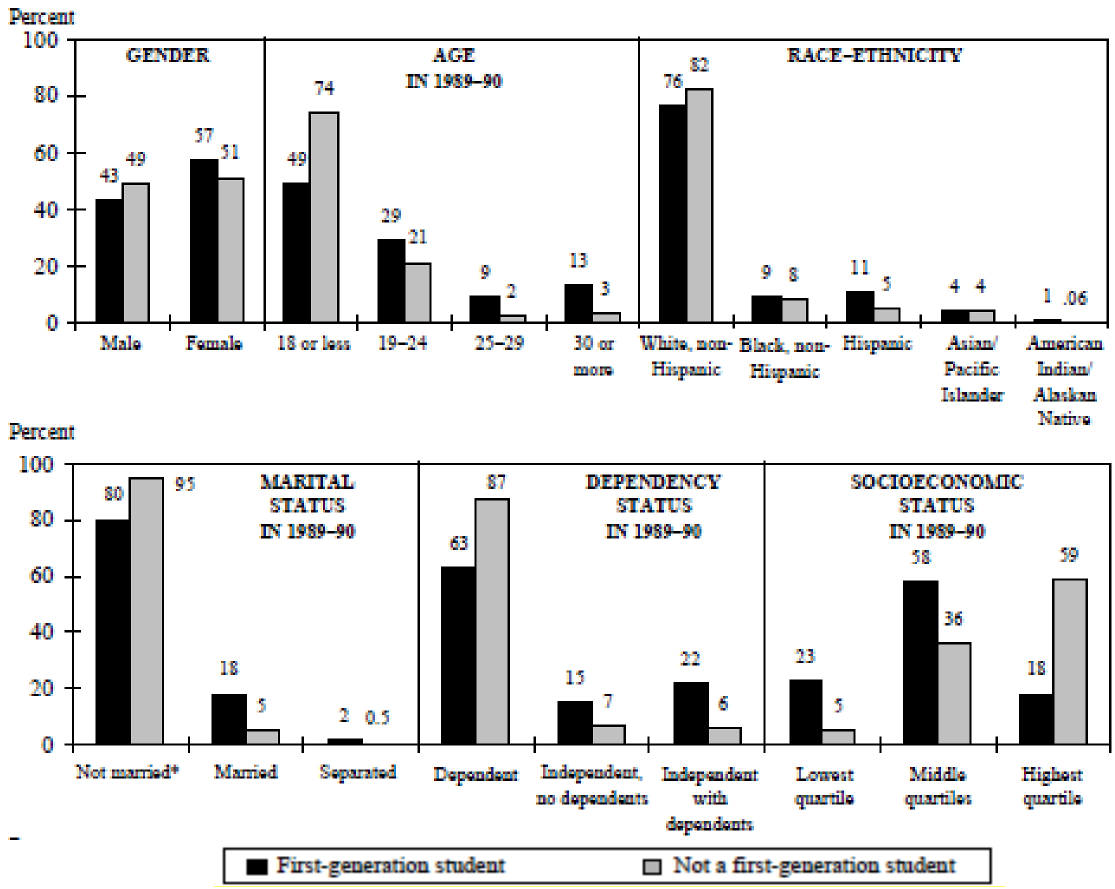
Choy (2001) samples the enrollment rates in 1995-96 of the first-generation students when neither parent has more than a high school education at varying types of postsecondary institutions and found 73 percent of students at less than two-year institutions have parents with no more than a high school education, 53 percent at two-year institution and 34 percent at four-year institution. Thus, as I expected, the proportion of first generation students declined as institution level increased.

Research has revealed that first-generation students are more likely to delay entry into postsecondary education and tend to begin college at a two-year institution. In the longitudinal study following a cohort of students as they moved through high school, Choy found that of high school graduates whose parents had high school diplomas or less, 59 percent enrolled in postsecondary education within two years after their high school graduation in comparison to 74.7 percent of students whose parents had some college, with 92 percent of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree or higher.

It seems equally important to now examine the likelihood that first-generation students who enter postsecondary education persist and attain their BA. Studies have found that the likelihood of first-generation students attaining a degree is highly affected by the student's successful completion of their first college year, and "after 5 years, first-generation students are less likely than others to have stay enrolled and obtain a degree (Choy, 2001, p. 26). In addition, they were also less likely than non-first generation to have obtained a BA (13 percent vs. 33 percent).

Given that the research reveals many factors to consider, it seemed logical to explore the demographic characteristics of first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students. In general, Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) found that first-generation college students were more likely to be older, to be from racial or ethnic minorities, of lower socioeconomic status, to be married and to have dependents than were non-first-generation student counterparts whose parents had attained a BA or higher (see Figure 3). The statistical findings of the study by Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) reveal not only broad differences between the groups but variability within the groups that provides differing information from my observations during my own working experiences. The age, ethnicity, marital status, dependency status and the socioeconomic status of first-generation students seems more variable than what I saw in my professional experience working with students who are single parents (mostly mothers but some fathers) young adults, predominantly minority who are low income, originating from low-income families. Therefore, the populations of first-generation students I've supported came from communities that did not represent the broad nation's postsecondary education communities.

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of 1980-90 beginning postsecondary students according to demographics by first generation status



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin 1998, p. 9).

The statistical data in comparison to my practical experience has inspired me to narrow my focus to concentrating on the low-income sub-group of first-generation students. I will explore especially how their income status has becomes an additional factor (in addition to their first-generation status) in their achievement. Thus, I am motivated to narrow my research to better understand how I might support low-income, first-generation students' success given the overwhelming challenges of both their socioeconomic and first generation status.

Low Income and First-Generation College Students

Engle and Tinto (2008) used some of the same databases as were used in previous studies to focus on this specific subcategory of low income, first-generation students. In their research, low-income college students are defined as students who come from a family household with an annual income under $25,000, and first generation students are defined as undergraduate students whose parents have not obtained their BA. A family income of $25,000 is generally the cut-off at which students remain eligible for the Federal Pell Grant and TRIO services programming. In other words, the income classification allows this sub-group of students to qualify for financial aid in the form of grants, in some cases scholarships and access to supplemental educational programming. It is estimated that there are currently 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, which is about 24 percent of the postsecondary undergraduate population (Engle and Tinto, 2008).

In their research, Engle and Tinto compared the demographic characteristics of low-income first generation students with non-low-income and non-first generation students. Consistent with my prior experiences the data shows disproportionate numbers of low income, first generation students came from minority backgrounds (54 percent for low income first generation vs. 26 percent of non-low-income, first-generation students), were older (when first enrolled 23 years old average for low income first-generation vs. 20 years old of non-low-income, non-first-generation students), had dependents (38 percent vs. 14 percent), were single parents (30 percent vs. 4 percent) and financially independent (74 percent vs. 27), and had a high school equivalency degree (12 percent vs. 4 percent) (Engle and Tinto, 2008, p. 8).

Where do low income, first generation students enroll and how likely are they to obtain their degree? According to Engle and Tinto's research (2008) the pathway to a bachelor's degree is not a direct one for low-income, first-generation college students, as most begin at community colleges. Typically, 52% of low-income, first-generation college students enter public two-year institutions whereas 13% of them will choose to attend a public four-year institution (Engle and Tinto, 2008, p.10). The majority of students who began their studies at a 2-year institutions are surveyed as intending to stay the course and earn a bachelor's degree or higher at some point in their postsecondary career. However, the rate at which low-income, first-generation college students earned bachelor's degree was more than 30 percent lower at public four-year institution and 40 percent lower at private four-year institutions than for students who were neither low-income nor first-generation (Engle and Tinto (2008, p.13). Furthermore, only 5 percent of low-income, first-generation students who began at public two-year institutions actually earned their bachelor's degree according to the Beginning Postsecondary Student longitudinal study surveying students six years later, despite the fact that 63 percent of these students aspired to do so upon entering postsecondary education (Engle and Tinto, 2008). According to Engle and Tinto (2008, p.11), across 2-year colleges and 4-year institutions, low-income, first generation students were four times more likely to leave college after the first year (26 percent vs. 7 percent non-first-generation, non-low-income students). As a result, students who are both low income and first-generation are far less likely to transfer into a four-year institution toward their baccalaureate (Lederman, 2008). Statistically, according to the Pell Institute's data, "69 percent of the low-income, first-generation students who enrolled in a two-year institutions did not transfer to a four-year institution (within the six year sample) to complete a BA degree, in comparison to 35 percent of students who are non- low income, non- first generation students" (Engle and Tinto, 2008, p. 13).

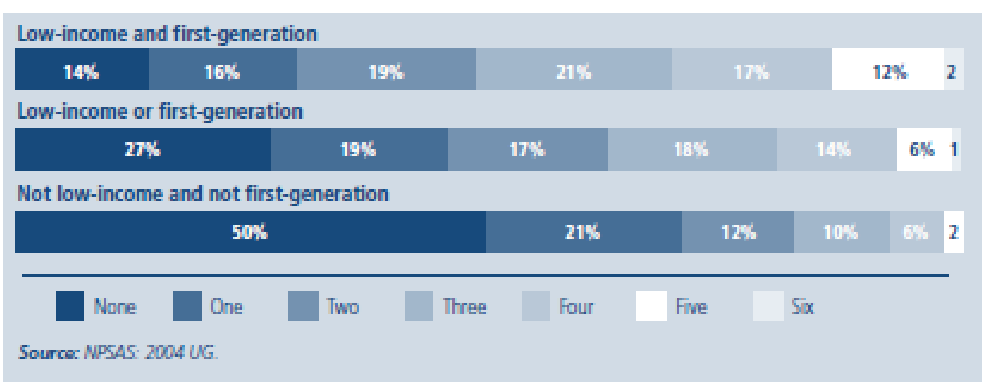
Obstacles Faced by Low Income First Generation Students

Given that low-income, first-generation college students differ from non-first-generation, non-low-income college students in the likelihood of their attaining a BA, the question is posed, "What are obstacles faced by low income first generation students in obtaining a BA?" Notably, low-income, first-generation college students' persistence and college attainment can be linked to a variety of risk factors as well as the students' family influences, their socioeconomic status, and academic preparedness. According to Eager and Tinto, (2008) the risk factors are often correlated with student's backgrounds characteristics and enrollment patterns and the more risk factors a student has, the more likely that student will fail to earn a bachelor's degree. Therefore, to develop a better understanding of the challenges that affect the success of low-income, first-generation college students, I will discuss four types of obstacles that must be addressed or understood to better serve these students.

Demographic and Enrollment Pattern Risk Factors

Engle & Tinto, (2008 p.9) note that prior research has identified seven factors that put students at increased risk of leaving college without attaining their degree. These areas of risk include (1) being students who have delayed entry to college after high school, (2) "attending part-time," (3) "working full-time," (4) "being students who are financially independent from parents," (5) "having dependent children," (6) "being single parent," and (7) "being students who have received their GED." Engle and Tinto, (2008) found that these factors match the demographic and enrollment characteristics of low-income, first-generation students and that these students have more risk factors from their counterparts (non-first-generation student who are not low-income). For example, in terms of enrollment, low-income, first-generation are more likely than their non-first-generation, non-low-income counterparts to: attend part-time (52 percent vs. 43 percent), delay entering after high school graduation (53 percent vs. 24 percent), or work full-time while enrolled (37 percent vs. 26 percent) (Engle and Tinto, 2008, p.10). The combination of these attributes leads to additional challenges for students who are the first in their family to go to college. Statistically, the average low-income, first-generation student has three such additional risk factors, while the average student who is neither first generation nor low income has one (Lederman, 2006 and Engle and Tinto, 2008) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage of Persistence Risk Factors Among Low-Income, First Generation 2003-04 Undergraduates



Source: Engle & Tinto, Moving Beyond Access 2008, p.9.

Family Influences

Low-income, first-generation college students lack educational mentors. Not having a family member who has attended or completed college can affect first generation students at a variety of points (on their path to a degree): for example, their secondary school courses selection, and their early reflections and personal aspiration to educational advancement and overall attitude to the commitment of attaining a college degree (Engle and Tinto, 2008).

According to Choy (2001) first-generation students formulate their educational plan between 8th and 10th grades. Furthermore, first-generation students' ultimate aspiration is tied to their parents' success attending and completing high school, as well as to whether or not their parents attended college, completed a BA degree, and went on for education beyond a BA. Furthermore, the student's parent's lack of educational involvement and participation in higher educational levels affects students' coursework selection in secondary and postsecondary education (Darling and Smith, 2002). According to Darling and Smith (2002) academic success begins in middle school, and students who take high school level algebra in the eighth grade and take advanced math classes in high school as well as advanced English, reading and science courses are significantly more likely to be academically prepared for college. In contrast, low-income, first-generation students are far less likely to have taken advantage of the necessary courses to supporting their academic progression toward enrollment in postsecondary education. Consequently, low-income, first-generation students' lack of preparation hinders their overall college experience and their ability to be persistent in reaching their educational goal (Chen, 2005), and lack of parental valuing of education is one cause of this under preparation.

Low-income, first-generation college students are also likely to have limited access to information about the college experience either first-hand or from relatives (Thayer, 2000).

As a result these students have limited resources, and their families are more likely to be not understanding or supportive of these students' plans for succeeding in postsecondary education pursuits; students are likely to lack knowledge of time management, college finances, budget-management, and the bureaucratic operation of higher education.

According to Thayer, (2000) the transition to college campus is particularly difficult for low-income, first-generation students. They experience difficulty leaving home to enter an unfamiliar academic setting, making students feel like there are entering an alien physical and social environment--an uncertain world where they already anticipate they will not fit and most likely will fail. When low-income, first-generation students experience this clash of values and culture, it affects their ability to integrate unfamiliar experiences within their social environments and they experience conflicts between the family structure of their old acquaintances, and new peers (Thayer, 2000).

As an educational practitioner, working with low-income, first-generation students I have witnessed the various levels of isolation, apprehension and alienation amongst family and friends due to their lack of educational exposure and culture shock.

Low-Income Status

Given that the socioeconomic status of low-income students differs from educated, middle-class families, these students not only have less money, but also are less likely to really recognize and embrace the full value of their educational process (Thayer, 2000). Students within this population tend to look at the financial burden within two lights.

First, low-income students face financial pressures associated with the immediate costs associated with participating in college. College is costly and being low income creates more financial pressures on low-income first generation students. Low-income students are defined as having a household annual income of under $25,000 and or those students whose family income does not exceed 150% of the poverty level (Engle and Tinto, 2008, Jewett, 2008). The fact that low-income student are eligible for financial aid to support their academic expenses can provide relief to make education more accessible for these students; however, financial aid (aid that is free money such as a grants) does not cover the cost of books, lab costs, the transportation costs, and other miscellaneous costs so students still feel a strong sense of pressure in taking on their educational endeavor.

Secondarily, low-income students experiencing their family background of being among parents who have not financed the cost of obtaining education beyond high school might adopt a poor attitude toward the value of an education and the value of financing it. Low-income, first-generation students are less likely to budget for the educational expenses given the competing costs of their living expenses; students may also outwardly lack the motivation to invest in educational expenses. When asked to pay for the extra expenditures, students do not always make favorable choices toward their educational progress such as; purchasing books, lab costs and necessary materials to succeed in class constructively (Thayer, 2000). As reported first-generation students tend to come from parents with lower income and lower levels of engagement in high school and college and both of these characteristics can influence the priority they give to educational expenses (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Furthermore, low-income, African-American and Latino families are less informed about financial aid; as a result they tend to overestimate the cost of tuition and underestimate available aid. Low-income, minority, first-generation college students are more apt to seek specific academic programs that are located close to their home and are low in cost so that they can maintain their financial responsibilities and their family connections (Darling and

Smith, 2002). Low-income, first-generation college students' concern with finances prevents them from exploring educational opportunities and experiences beyond the familiar surroundings of the community in which they live. This prevents students from expanding their horizons and enrolling in postsecondary institutions beyond their known environment. Some low-income students are likely to perceive less support from their families for attending college; they can be under family pressure to enter the workforce right after high school (Jewett, 2008, Thayer, 2000). As a result low-income students might try their hand at working first and only later realize the disadvantage of not obtaining a college degree, which would allow them to have better vocational and economic outcomes. To that end, low-income student may delay college entry upon graduation from high school or completing their GED's.

Presently assisting low-income individuals (specifically adults and potentially first-generation student) living in the shelter, I have witnessed that they are constantly competing with how to budget their expenses, as their overall income does not cover their total living expenses. Low-income, minority, first-generation students who delay entry into postsecondary education after high school are less likely to develop strong relationships with other students, to become involved in campus clubs and organizations, and less likely to develop relationships with faculty members as they perceive faculty are not concerned with their educational development (Pike and Kuh 2005, Darling and Smith 2002). According to Engle and Tinto, (2008) due to the greater number of these risk factors among low-income, first-generation student, students might not sustain college studies beyond a year.

Academic Preparedness

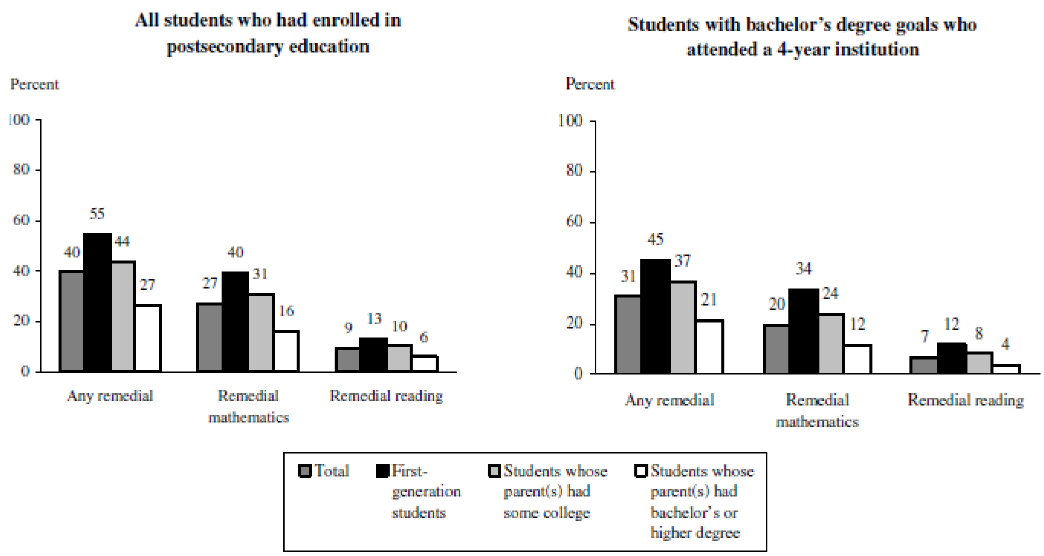
Low-income, first-generation college students tend to come from families who have not experienced educational preparation beyond high school, due to their families lower levels of engagement in high school (Pike & Kuth, 2005). These students are considerably less likely to be academically prepared to gain admission to college and to enroll in college level courses (Engle, 2007). Therefore, first-generation students from low-income who lack academic preparedness find it exceptionally difficult to adjust to college. Furthermore, research has found these students have lower pre-college critical thinking levels, significantly lower SAT scores and high school grade point averages (Thayer, 2000).

An example of the unpreparedness of first generation students is in their lack of basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of reading, writing or mathematics (Tritelli, 2003). Moreover, for many low-income, first-generation college students, the open door of American higher education access has generated the vast majority of low-income, first-generation students who preferred enrollment in a two-year opposed to a four-year institution. In these instances, students are required to take a college placement exam for consideration to the specific classes students can enroll in. The results of these tests reveal that the majority of this sub-group of students entering two-year institutions must enroll in college-preparatory course as a means to address their academic insufficiency during their first college year experience. Although I am highlighting low-income, first-generation college students' college pathway within two-year institutions and beyond, it is still important to note what this sub-group of students also encounters difficulties when enrolling at a four-year institution first and their lack of academic preparedness.

Research reveals that students were very likely to get a bachelor's degree if they had high senior year test scores, although non-first generation students were even more likely than first-generation to get a degree. Among students with low-test scores, most did not get a degree, although students were more likely to get a degree if their parents had gone to college.

Since low-income first-generation college students who enroll at a 2-year college are not required to take the SAT or the ACT, as earlier stated, their unpreparedness is reflected when they take the college entrance placement exams, which at Massachusetts' public 2-year institution is the accuplacer. Given, community colleges are open-enrollment institutions; students are instructed on what college prep courses they can take in order to advance into college level math, English, science, and reading upon assessing students' placement scores from accuplacer.

Figure 5. Generation Status 1992, 12-graders who had enrolled in Postsecondary Education between 1992-2000 percentages who took Remedial Courses



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Chen, 2005. p.11

Figure 5 shows the percent of students taking remedial courses, with a breakdown by generational status, for 12 graders who had enrolled in postsecondary education and 12th graders who aspired to attend a 4-year institution. The data provides a breakdown concerning first generation whose parents never attended college, students who parents had some college experience, and students whose parents attained their BA degree or higher (but does not include the specific subgroup of low income and first generation students). The data shows that over half of first-generation students need to take some remedial courses in college, with remedial courses supplementing math more common than reading. The proportions decline for those students whose parents have had some college or earned a BA, although still significant (Chen, 2005). In chapter three, I address further how developmental education programming is the bridge in supporting unprepared students in college.

Conclusions

The research data showing low persistence and degree attainment of low-income, first-generation college students, especially when they start at community college, raises the important question of why these students are less likely than their peers to complete college particularly at the baccalaureate level and what can be done to help them. After surveying the rich literature of the various characteristics of low-income, first-generation students that might present challenges to their educational completion, it still seems logical to me for these students and their families to consider a two-year public college. The culture of community college as an open access institution and its student-centered environment is a good fit for low-income, first-generation college students; it is also lower cost and more affordable.

As a practitioner working with low-income families, I have found that first-generation students in most cases experience a sense of anxiety in contemplating their education beyond high school and for adult learners who are experiencing various challenges such as homelessness, unemployment, or who are inexperienced in participating in the workforce, the anxiety and pressure is enormous. Likewise, as a family service practitioner working with at-risk youth and their families, I have found encouraging them to invest in postsecondary education is a hard sell. In an attempt to support students' academic preparedness, as a former Educational Trainer Coordinator of educational programming for at-risk families in Roxbury, Massachusetts, I developed and facilitated a workshop entitled "Pathway to College." This workshop was specifically developed to help address the needs of students with some of the above characteristics and to inform students how persistence, dedication and commitment to staying on course with their educational track would assist them in eventually obtaining an associate's degree and ultimately the bachelor's degree. As the creator of the workshop my main aim was to demolish students' overall physiological fears to succeeding in college, by giving participating students the opportunity to meet other students who currently are completing their associate's degree and who have graduated, to participate in college fairs, college tours, and to meet college personnel speaking on a panelist discussion)]. To that end panelists were selected for the beginning and the ending of the three-day workshops. The first set of panelists were former low-income, first-generation student who had succeed in their educational and vocational aspirations, and the final panelists were colleges representatives who discussed their particular educational institutions' academic programs and enrollment policies; college representatives also discussed their personal accounts of their educational pathways and its effects on its careers.

Interestingly, my experience of creating a curriculum for my workshop based on the trends and themes of the students I served had already exposed me to low-income, first-generation college students and many challenges they faces among their peers. While the research demonstrated students face many obstacles, I attempted to emphasize common themes I have witnessed in my practice such as students' lack of family support, students' lack of financial resources and academic unpreparedness. Each of these areas is major influencers on low-income, first-generation students' success. However, I would regard low-income, first-generation college students' lack of academic preparedness as the area most essential to master. Through the means of developmental educational programs, students who are less prepared to attend college can address the gaps in their educational process. In the next chapter, I will explore the education development process of student support services through the form of a longstanding student success programming, along with looking at new measures within the educational institutional structure to address meeting student needs of fostering higher graduation rates and degree attainment.

CHAPTER 3

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

As explained in the previous chapters, first-generation students are diverse in their demographic characteristics; however the subcategory I am focusing on has been low-income, first-generation students. These students are faced with various barriers to navigating postsecondary education to persist and actually attain their bachelor's degree. Often these barriers are not detected until later in their educational development which dramatically affects their educational process. Serving this emerging diverse group of students has challenged college administrators and practitioners to reconsider whether traditional practices are adequate to the needs of these contemporary students (Choate and Smith, 2000). College administrators and practitioners are recognizing that simply providing educational access does not necessarily equate with college success. Thus, educational institutions have striven to devise educational models that are intended to support first-generation students' completion of postsecondary degrees.

The pathway to a college degree for many low income and first-generation students can seem impracticable and impossible to achieve. Given that their degree attainment rates are low, the focus of this chapter is to explore the possible routes to success of first-generation college students, especially when they are starting at a community college and have aspirations to attaining their bachelor's degree. Likewise, this chapter will explore how historically the design of community colleges supports the diversity of first-generation students and how at present the design of community colleges is evolving to support their persistence after the first year as well as their successful transfer and completion of a BA degree.

In pursuit of my question, "What are effective pathways to success?" I will examine two contrasting models. The two models that I will examine are: (a) TRIO (especially Student Support Services or SSS, one specific TRIO developmental program) in greater detail, a longstanding federally funded program that directly provides educational opportunity outreach programming that serves both community colleges and universities and that specifically targets low-income, first-generation college students, and (b) Achieving the Dream. The latter program also strives to serve the same sub-population of low-income, first-generation college students though an innovative educational model aimed more broadly to improve the success of the entire student population who enter community colleges. Furthermore, this bold new national initiative offers community colleges that obtain membership ways to strengthen their efforts to develop a student-centered model of institutional improvement that could affect student success.

Thus, this chapter explores whether and how student success is enhanced by both models. I explore each model's history, its success rates (if known) in supporting low income first-generation students in their attainment of a bachelor's degree, and ultimately what they consider their best practices and how these practices have evolved over the years. Lastly, to get the perspective of an experienced practitioner, I survey a Director of a TRIO Student Support Service program at Bunker Hill Community College, a local two-year college, to explore her views on how BHCC TRIO's SSS best serves low-income, first-generation college students.

The Historical Mission of Community Colleges

The original mission of community colleges was to support a wide variety of students regardless of their socioeconomic status, including minority students, first-generation college students, students with poor academic preparedness and students from low-income families who are all representative at our nation's community colleges to date (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005). The premise of our nation's community colleges has been rooted in the design of an open door, democratic "people's college" institution, whose crucial role is to provide educational access to high quality, affordable academic programs, vocational training and instruction that is committed to excellence in teaching, learning and critical thinking, and which then enables students to advance and transfer to a four-year institution (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2011).

In 1901 the first junior college was formed in America now popularly known as community colleges (Drury, 2003). A social movement was sparked by advocatory groups such as students, parents, educators, businesses, state university and government officials, who were responding to the early twentieth century events of urbanization, industrialization and changes in economic development to promote pathways of alternative education to the four-year colleges (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005). Our nation today is faced with new economic challenges along with a society changing from an industrialization system to a technical nation. As our societal needs are changing, individuals are challenged to keep up with the changing needs of the workforce. These massive changes require presently employed or unemployed workers to refresh their skills to stay competitive in maintaining their employment. Thus, the current 21st century recession directly coincided with the surge in overall college enrollment which is a direct indication of how individuals are striving to make themselves marketable within the workforce. The present generation of students who enroll in our nation's college campuses will reportedly be the most ethnically heterogeneous, representing possibly the poorest ever to seek education beyond high school (Callon, 2002).

Given that the current conditions of our economy are challenging for most Americans, it is especially important for low-income families to obtain better jobs and upgrade their skills for their family's livelihood. The notion of low-income, first-generation students participating in education beyond secondary education not only allows them to compete in the workforce, but it allows for their personal development along with their exposure to a host of different life experiences that will enhance and prepare them for situations in and out of the workforce. In my current position as a practitioner working in a family shelter supporting at-risk single as well as two parent families, I have seen first-hand how a two-parent working family living in the greater Boston area on minimum wage salaries cannot afford the expenses of sustaining their housing. The inadequacies of minimum wage salaries to support basic living promotes and encourages the poorest populations to pursue communities colleges' mission of providing vocational training as well as the viable option of advancing their knowledge through postsecondary education.

As stated in Chapter 2, low-income, first-generation college students often arrive at postsecondary institutions with limited levels of academic preparedness. Community colleges' commitment to open access has challenged the education industry to adapt to educating a diverse student population, many of whom need developmental education. According to Engle and Tinto, (2008, p.25) given that low-income, first-generation college students tend to enter college less prepared than other students, institutions need to provide a wide range of academic support programs including developmental education courses which essentially provide supplemental instruction. Increasingly, developmental education courses are creating learning communities linking basic skills courses like writing with content courses such as history as these have been shown to be particularly effective with at-risk students (Engle, Tinto, 2008, p.25).

In my personal experience in several community colleges as a Student Success Advisor, I have worked with an array of students who were low-income, first-generation adult college students. For example, as an Academic Advisor at Quincy College, in Quincy MA, I witnessed students entering admissions after taking the accuplacer exam and the results of their test scores revealed that students were in need of improving their math, reading, or writing. It is important to note that, community colleges, being an open enrollment system, do not automatically register students for college-level classes. In order to determine if remedial coursework is necessary, most community colleges require placement tests, such as: the College Board ACCUPLACER test to assess the reading, writing, and math skills of entering students for placement in college courses. The students with whom I worked at Quincy College who took the accuplacer were at various levels of their development of basic skills, which prevented them from enrolling directly in college level coursework. To this end, institutions of higher learning have come to realize that developmental education is necessary to enhance educational opportunities especially for first-generation college learners.

From my practical experiences working in community college settings it seem logical that developmental education is essential in supporting the low-income, first-generation students who enroll. This leads to the question of how developmental courses are viewed in postsecondary education. I found that the practice of developmental education has not been without controversy. Developmental education has also been referred to as "remedial or basic skill education"; however educators have adopted the term "developmental education" as the term “remedial education” was viewed as an unfavorable label amongst the educational professionals (Russell, 2008; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, Levey , 2006).

Institutions of higher learning now offer developmental courses for students who lack basic skills in either, reading, writing and mathematics and which are essential in mastering college level course work (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, Levey, 2006). Interestingly, its practice is widespread with estimation that 40 percent of *non-first-generation students* take at least one such developmental course, which dispels the myth that developmental education is only aimed at older students who are from low socioeconomic and academically unprepared backgrounds (Russell, 2008 and Attewell, Lavin, Domina, Levey, 2006). The research highlights many areas of debate on the subject of developmental or remedial education. Four areas of criticism that are highlighted in Attewell et al. (2006) that I would like to address are; (1) Are public colleges and universities lowering their commitment to academic standard and being “dumbed down” to allow for underprepared students to complete college? (2) Are students who partake in developmental education incapable of graduating from college, (3) Does taking developmental education courses actually make it less likely that one will persist and graduate from college? And (4) Do developmental education courses waste tax payers’ money?

Some of the skepticism surrounding the commitment of public postsecondary education to maintain high academic standards and excellence can be dispelled by data that public institutions of higher learning are actually more likely than private institutions to require developmental education courses for students who enter with low levels of basic skills. (Attewell et al, 2006). Thus, the policy of public institutions in which any student who enters college with lower levels of skills is required to participate in developmental courses is a validation of the high standards established by public and community colleges which all students must meet.

How likely are students who take developmental education courses to graduate? According to Attewell et al (2006), 28 percent of students who attended 2-year college and who took developmental courses graduated with a BA in 8.5 years compared to 43 percent of community college students who did not take developmental education courses; 52 percent of students who took developmental coursework in a 4-year college graduated with a BA in 8.5 years compared to 78 percent non- developmental course takers. Further, it was revealed that 50 percent of African Americans and 34 percent of Hispanic received a bachelor degree after taking developmental education courses. Are the statistics that great? Personally I would answer there is room for improvement; however, the numbers do counter the notion that students who take developmental education are incapable of graduating from college in substantial numbers.

In addition to the controversy surrounding the effectiveness of developmental education, it would be remiss not to examine the continual criticism of the possible harmful effects of students taking developmental courses and how students' may possibly suffer from lower graduation rates—for example, if taking developmental education courses slows students down, makes it more likely for them to drop out, less motivated to continue, etc.. To debunk this falsehood, Attewell et al (2006 p.891) report that prior research has shown:

> Among students in bachelor's degree programs, those who passed at least one of their remedial courses were more likely to persis in college than were comparable low-skill nonremedial students, and they earned more credits. After 5 years, the former were slightly more likely to graduate….Among two-year college entrants, there were similar results. Students who passed at least one of their remedial courses (85 percent of takers were in this category) were more likely to stay in college, and were more likely to graduate or to transfer into a bachelor degree program than were otherwise similar student who did not remedial coursework.

They also report new data from their own study that suggests that community college students actually *enhance* their educational development by taking and successfully completing developmental courses. Although no such positive effects were observed for students at 4-year insitutions in their study, no harmful effects were observed either (they graduated at about the same rate.)

In addition, to examine the notion that taking *many* developmental courses is harmful and those students who take many such courses might be "*especially harmed by remediation*," Attewell, Lavin, Domina and Levey (2006 p.906), examined the outcomes for those who enrolled in three or more developmental courses. (In fact taking that many remedial courses is atypical.) The specific study observed the effects on students' (1) earning ten or fewer credits, (2) students' retention prior to receiving first degree, (3) students' earned degree from either a 2-year or a 4-year institution, and (4) the time it took the student to attain a bachelor degree. For the purpose of my research, I will focus on the students' outcome of earning a degree within the 2 and 4 year institutions. They found that for students' in 2-year institutions (i.e., community colleges) there were no significant negative influences of "taking multiple developmental courses prior to graduation, nor any discernible effects or likelihood of graduation from a 2-year institution" (Attewell, Lavin, Domina and Levey, 2006, p. 908). However, the findings were slightly different for students attending a 4-year institution. In the case of students' enrolled in a 4-year institution their graduation rates were between12 and 13 percent lower than their peers with comparable skills and backgrounds that took fewer or no developmental educational courses and they found that taking developmental courses extended their time to getting their bachelor's degree.

In summary, according to the new research reported in Attewell, Lavin, Domina and Levey (2006), students' in 2-year colleges fare better than students' in 4-year college in relations to the research with respect to the effects of taking developmental courses, compared to their peers in those different institutions. It would be interesting to explore more why this should be. Clearly, however, for community college students, taking developmental courses has no negative effects and successfully completing them is actually beneficial, compared to students with equivalent skills who do not take them.

Finally, there is much debate in the literature about whether or not developmental education is useful based on its cost effectiveness. State policymakers in the 1990's took issue with the rising education budget, arguing the seeming waste of paying twice for educational courses that students have been taught already in high school (Russell, 2008) In addition, some educational administrators suggested budgetary action to limit developmental education in an attempt to reduce costs to taxpayers (Russell, 2008). Interestingly, because of the controversy about cost effectiveness, research directed at studying the effectiveness of remedial education programs are underfunded and inconclusive (Attewell, Lavin, Domina , Levey, 2006). Attewell, Lavin, Domina and Levey (2006) point out, however, there are true benefits for students who earn a degree as they are able to enjoy a considerably higher income. Also, even students who do attempt to obtain their college degrees and fail are better off economically in comparison to a high school graduate. In other words, even though the courses do in a sense involve paying for a student to take the same course twice, some students need the courses to help them persist and graduate, and graduating and even just persisting short of graduation helps those students and contributes to the economy, and so is cost-effective in the long run.

Even though I suppose the debate will continue on how tax monies are best used and the ultimate effectiveness and efficiency of developmental education, I found Attewell et al's review of data on the benefits of successful completion of developmental education courses (especially for community college students) of great interest as my own experience also leads me to see the importance of developmental education. In my fifteen year tenure of working with families and students transitioning into postsecondary education, I have seen the positive results of students who participated in developmental education and witnessed the phenomenal results of their participation. My professional experience leads me to believe developmental education is a necessary bridge to helping students in need to attain high levels of education within the postsecondary communities, especially for students who enter with inadequate skills.

However, although developmental education has its place in supporting the educational development of low-income, first-generation college students, it is important to note there are also a host of other services that are valuable to consider when supporting students that are less prepared to enter postsecondary educational institutions. Through the examination of TRIO, a longstanding federally fund program whose central focus is to utilize developmental education (among other supports) to promote student success, I will survey the success rate of students who receive their educational services. Aside from the student-based model of TRIO, I will also survey the results of an innovative new initiative within the community college system that aims to enhance the community colleges' ability to foster student success.

Models of Pathways of Success: The TRIO Programs

In the 1960's the federal government was charged to develop a solution to increase the educational completion and advancements of low-income Americans. The federal TRIO programs are designed to provide educational opportunity and outreach programming whose purpose is to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over the years, the TRIO program has expanded its services as the federal government endorsed additional funding and through this expansion created a continuum of support for disadvantaged students specifically targeting low-income, first-generation and disabled students that stretched from middle school through college (U.S. Department of Education, 2011 (www2.ed.gov)). In this section, I first explore how the TRIO programs came into existence, reviewing the array of TRIO programming. I then specifically examine the TRIO Student Support Service program, and evidence for the program's effectiveness with low-income, first-generation college students.

Of the five distinct outreach programs which assist students on their academic journey from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs, the TRIO program's progressive development started with Upward Bound, the first of its programming materializing from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. From the War on Poverty in 1965 the TRIO program extended its services and formulated its second outreach program entitled "Talent Search." The Higher Education Act in 1968 endorsed what is presently referred to as the "Student Support Services Program" (henceforth called SSS); however; it was previously named Special Services for Disabled Students. The three original federal programs of Upward Bound, Talent Search and Student Support Services, inspired the program to be named TRIO to encompass a three-fold educational program that could stand alone, although it was included as a part of the U.S. Higher Education Act of 1965. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011 (www2.ed.gov)).

In later years, TRIO expanded its services with the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 enabling the creation of Education Opportunity Centers and in 1976 with the extended Higher Education Amendment which authorized the training program via the advancement of educational opportunity. In addition, the original 1964 Upward Bound program expanded with Upward Bound Math/Science and Veterans Upward Bound (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Each one of TRIO's distinctive programs is developmentally designed to address the needs of a specific target population. For the purpose of my synthesis, I will focus on the TRIO programming that best services the targeted subgroup I am pleased to work with. The first-generation students I am presently serving within the community shelter are in most cases older single mothers, who are low-income, first-generation, and in some cases homeless or transitioning from homelessness. Given these demographics, I would like to highlight TRIO's Student Support Services (SSS) program (See Table 1), rather than its programs for younger high school students.

Table 1:

Descriptive Functions of the TRIO Programs

NAME	PROGRAMMING
UPWARD BOUND	Helps students prepare for higher education. Participants receive instruction in literature, composition, foreign language, mathematics, and science on college campuses after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer.
TALENT SEARCH	Programs serve young people in grades six through twelve. In addition to counseling, participants receive information about college admission requirements, scholarships, and various student financial aid programs. This early intervention program helps young people to better understand their educational opportunities and options.
STUENT SUPPORT SERVICES	Helps students to stay in college until they earn their baccalaureate degree. Participants, who include disabled college students, receive tutoring, counseling, and remedial instruction.
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS	Primarily serve displaced or underemployed workers. These Centers help people to choose a college and a suitable financial aid program.

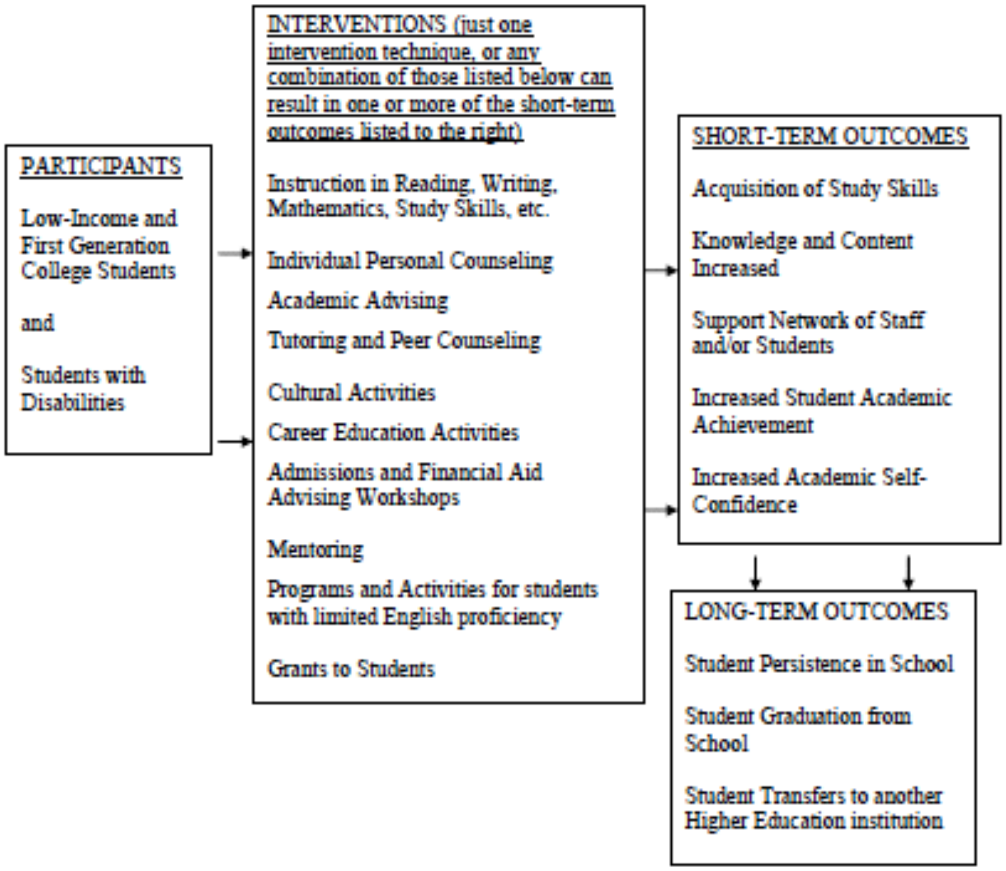
RONALD E. MCNAIR POST-BACCALAUREATE ACHIEVEMENT	Programs encourage low-income and minority undergraduates to consider careers in college teaching as well as prepare for doctoral study. Students who participate in this program are provided with research opportunities and faculty mentors.

Source: The Education Resource Institute, Coles, 1998, (pg. 432-433).

To be eligible and receive assistance from TRIO's programming, two-thirds of the participants in any SSS project must be first-generation college students from low-income families or disabled. The remainder one-third must be *either* low-income *or* first generation students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). According to Thomas, Farrow, Martinez, (1998, p.1) TRIO-SSS has three major goals: 1) increase student retention and graduation rates, 2) increase the transfer rates from a two-to four-year institutions, 3) and foster an institutional climate of supportive student success.

Pacchetti (2009), a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, provides a diagram that offers an even more helpful conceptual understanding by outlining the variety of *interventions* they have developed to meet the defined goals and a variety of ways of measuring student success for participants in the TRIO-SSS program (see Figure 1) The Pacchetti (2009) model is ideal in illuminating the TRIO-SSS program theory and providing a helpful visualization of both the short-term and long-term anticipated program outcomes. This led me to ask, "Of these interventions, what are the best practices for assisting first-generation college student's success?" With that question being at the core of my process it seemed appropriate to showcase Pacchetti's (2009, p. 36-37) findings from his literature review.

Figure 6: Conceptual Framework of the Student Support Program



Source: Pacchetti, 2009, p. 35

Although there are a broad range of services that TRIO SSS programs might offer, individual programs are not required to offer all of them, and vary in what they do. Pacchetti (2009, p.36) describes several studies that sought to identify the most helpful of the SSS services. The table below (Table 2) summarizes what Pacchetti found, organized by: (a) most successful (because they are linked to increase in GPA, retention, or course taking; and (b) other services.

Table 2: Program Techniques Used to Enhance Student Educational Development

Most Successful Techniques in improving GPA, Retention	Other SSS Services
Instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, and other subjects necessary for success beyond secondary school Peer tutoring and other tutorial services Counseling and peer counseling Career education activities such as SSS Workshops Activities designed to ensure admission and financial assistance to 4-year institutions, for students at 2-year institutions.	Academic advice and assistance in course selection Personal Counseling Exposure to cultural events Exposure to academic programs not usually available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds Activities that help to ensure admission and financial assistance in graduate and professional programs Mentoring programs involving faculty or upper-class students Specialized programs for students with limited English proficiency.

Adapted from Pacchetti, 2009, p. 36-37

Pacchetti based her summary table in part on the report of the National Study of Student Support Services that examined what service practices yielded the greatest outcome for the students who participated in TRIO' SSS programs (as reflected in increased grade point averages or retention) and where the size of the effects on these favored outcomes increased with the amount of exposure to specific interventions. Hence, the National Study of Student Support Services (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan and Rak, 1997) provided valuable insights to TRIO SSS programming best practices and evidence that the program had some beneficial results.

However it is also important to note another finding of the report that sheds light on what hinders the success of the Program in achieving its overall goal of having more students' complete their bachelor degree. According to Muraskin (1997) when evaluating the overall service level of TRIO SSS it was moderate at best. In general, TRIO SSS within the study sample serves a large number of students within the limited resources of the programing, which results in eligible students on average meeting only on twelve occasions per year to participate and receive services. Freshmen students were receiving services at a slightly higher rate: fifteen hours for freshmen and six hours for other students. Indeed, 9 percent of students who participate have on average only one contact per year with their TRIO SSS center (Muraskin, 1997). In addition, there are many low income and first generation students who do not participate in these programs. According Balz & Esten 1998, p.341) it is estimated that 11 million Americans critically need access to and could benefit from the TRIO programs, but actually, funding levels only allow for only about 5% of eligible youth and adults can be served.

The TRIO-SSS has clearly defined its goals of empowering students to remain enrolled in postsecondary education, accrue more college credits and earn higher grade point averages since the origin of the programming in the late 1960's. Another clear way of measurement of its success is when low-income, first-generation college students attain their associates' degree and transfer into a 4-year institution to attain their bachelor's degree. Locating the data for this one goal was mystifying at best. However, I was able to locate some findings of how educational attainment of TRIO participants (across multiple programs, not just SSS) compared with TRIO eligible non-participants, as revealed by the highest level of education attainment achieved 10 years later for participants in a High School and Beyond (HS&B) survey (Balz & Esten, 1998). Although these statistics are not specific to TRIO SSS program, they are useful in consideration of the TRIO program's overall effectiveness for low-income, first-generation students.

This study reported that TRIO participants had greater academic success than did their non-TRIO counterparts. The results of the study showed that nearly 11% of TRIO participants reported having some graduate school experience compared to 5% of the non-TRIO matched comparison group. Further, over 30% of TRIO participants attained their bachelor's degree within the 10-year timeframe compared to 12.9% of the non-TRIO population that was also TRIO eligible. That is certainly a noteworthy difference. The absolute percentage of those attaining a BA was higher for those who started at 4-year institutions rather than community colleges; but regardless of institution attended, participation in TRIO made a large and significant difference.

In conclusion, the specialized programming for low-income adults provided by the TRIO-SSS and other programs is as relevant today as it was in the 1960s. Furthermore, the success of TRIO's programming is a testament to President Obama's call to education of advancing all citizens' vocational abilities, access and their attainment to a college degree. Students who are able to get the maximum service time, benefit greatly from the program.

An Institutional Model for Student Success: Achieving the Dream--Success Begets Success

The best practices of the TRIO SSS program for improving academic performance and student retention include providing instructional courses in reading, writing, and study skills, peer tutoring and counseling, and career workshops (Pacchetti, 2009). Further students who participate in TRIO have improved college graduation rates compared to those of similar backgrounds who do not participate (Balz & Esten, 1998). Although the college communities have reverence for TRIO SSS and all its programming, the reported limitations are areas that still need improvement. The fact that many eligible students are not able to participate in the program due to limited federal expenditures and that students who participate suffer from limited contact hours are serious shortcomings that often makes it difficult to translate the promise of the program into more students overall success.

An alternative model takes a deeper look at supporting student success from an institutional perspective. The simple premise of the alternate model is rooted in promotion of student success by having a tracking device that reveals how well the institution is accomplishing the educational success it claims to value. This alternative model has similar goals to TRIO's mission to promote education opportunity and access; however, this alternative model takes an additional step by fostering the collaboration of the entire educational institution to establish measureable tools to track all students' progress in achieving the proposed outcome. In other words, it focuses on the question: How can community colleges systematically influence their entire educational structure? How can community colleges define their success?

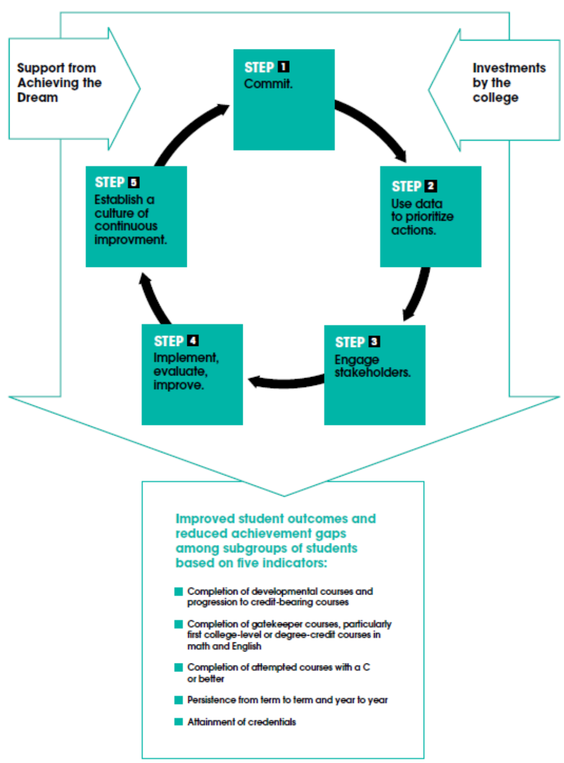
The alternative model was developed by a constituency of concerned educational practitioners who sought to answer the question of how could community colleges affect students' success more effectively. This constituency devised the initiative known as the Achieve the Dream (ATD) movement. The founding partnerships conceived this movement in 2004 and include the Lumina Foundation for Education, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas-Austin (CCLP), Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, Jobs for the Future; MDC, MDRC; and Public Agenda (Lumina

Foundation for Education, 2009). According to ATD's National Partnership, the primary concern was to foster community college administrators' understanding of effective principles of institutional improvement. They noted "most efforts to improve community college students' outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins, ATD [in contrast] is based on the premise that to improve student success on a substantial scale, colleges need to fundamentally change the way they operate" (Hearne, 2009 p.8). Thus, from the creative minds of concerned practitioners a movement to purposefully serve students success has emerged.

The ATD initiative uses a grassroots level strategy to accomplish the big-picture outcomes, namely ensuring students' success toward completing their associate credential and continuing to a four-year institution to obtain their bachelor's degree. The motto of this initiative is "that success begets success and every incremental milestone from every student can be positively affected by community colleges leaders and educators" (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010, p.3). Built on the values of equity and excellence, ATD advances community college students' success through work on four fronts: (a) on campuses and (b) in research, (c) public engagement and (d) public policy — and emphasizes the use of data to drive change.

When looking at how community colleges foster students' success, I was gripped by the student-centered model, which also focuses on the role of the institution in improvement by creating a culture of evidence mandated by Achieve the Dream. As a practitioner examining the efforts and effects of the community college's institutional practices as it relates to serving first-generation students, I am most impressed with this inventive approach to creating checks and balances that drive an institutional culture of success for all students who might participate. The framework of the ATD imitative includes several levels of progressive standards which center on four fundamental principles of institutional improvement: 1) committed leadership, 2) use of evidence to improve programs and services, 3) broad engagement and 4) systemic institutional improvement. The four principles of institutional improvement provide the foundation for the five-step process for increasing student success: 1) commit to improving student outcomes; 2) use data to prioritize actions; 3) engage stakeholders to help develop a plan; 4) implement, evaluate, and improve strategies; and 5) establish a culture of continuous improvement (See Figure 6).

Figure 7: Achieving the Dream Five-Step Process for Increasing Student Success through Institutional Improvement



Resource: Lumina Foundation for Education 2000

Interestingly, this five-step approach is similar to the model I studied within the CCT graduate program known as the action research model. Parallel to this model, it is a circular process of identifying a question and issue to resolve though a series of solutions, proposing solutions, examining their effectiveness, examining what worked and what might not have worked, reconsidering the question or problem and establishing a new approach or process of resolving the issue that might not have been revealed in the initial process of examining the question or problem. Similar to the action research model, the five-step process identifies the characteristics necessary in each stage of the circular model to meeting the necessary circumstance of the individual college's institutional needs to reaching its goal to serving students effectively.

ATD's ultimate goal is to enable students to earn their postsecondary credentials recognizing community college students often take longer to earn their degrees. As earlier stated and analyzed through longitudinal studies, it was documented that students who are low-income and first in their families to go to college will statistically take longer to obtain their college credential. ATD acknowledges this barrier for this subgroup of students and actively approaches its commitment to gather and analyze data of student performance throughout each phase of their academic journey. More specifically, ATD works by assessing the institution's effectiveness in promoting student progression through a series of intermediate milestones: 1) successfully complete remedial or developmental instruction and advance to credit-bearing courses; 2) enroll in and successfully complete the initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English; 3) complete the courses they take with a grade of C or better; 4) persist from one term to the next; and 5) earn a certificate or associates degree (Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011). Overall, the all-encompassing holistic approach of checks and balances to foster student's development and ultimately student success is a multi-faceted process for community colleges that participate with Achieve the Dream initiative.

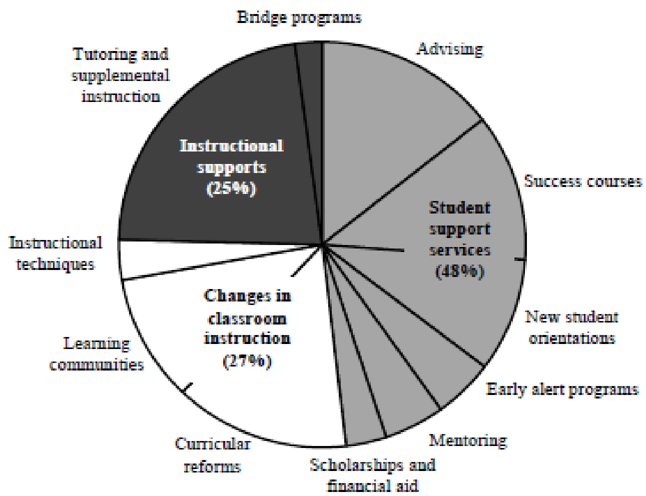
The Achieve the Dream initiative provides community colleges with an intentional tool and conceptual and practical methodology to enable students to reach their goals. Promoting a culture of student success is not a small task. Respectively, what distinguishes community colleges that partake in this work is the benefit of a comprehensive network. Taking into consideration that no two colleges are alike, this extended resource allows access to other participating colleges and in addition each institution's membership allows the specific tools of professional development through coaching, data facilitation and the technology that will help with implementation toward engagement within the evidence-driven process of increasing student success (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010).

This initiative is not practiced in all 1,200 community college across the nation, as each individual college must apply to be part of the program and to get the tangible benefits that will support the college's direct efforts of student success through institutional improvement. Participating institutions also become part of a national community of like-minded leaders and learners deeply committed to student success and closing achievement gaps. All colleges in this community are expected to be active learners and are expected to disseminate lessons learned and successful data and service tools at their institutions (achievingthedream.com, 2011).

Every year community college that would like to benefit from the evidence driven institutional improvements of ATD can submit their proposal for their consideration to participate. To apply, they complete a survey of interest to measure the community colleges' commitment and participation through five-step approach as an appraisal gauge. In the first round, 26 colleges joined the ATD initiative from states such as Florida, North Caroline, Texas and Virginia. The particular selection of first round colleges initiated by ATD was largely associated with an outcry within the regions' colleges that had identified colleges in high-need areas. Since the launch of the ATD initiative in 2004 additional colleges have been added. Each year 20-30 potential new colleges can apply. As of December 2010, 130 community colleges in 24 states had become involved in initializing the tools towards increasing student success. The five-step approach is re-initiated as a plan of action for each of the individual community colleges as they start to examine the necessary focus areas for improvement (Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011).

What kinds of new programs have been implemented by community colleges as a result of participating in ATD? The diagram (Figure 7) shows the relative popularity of a variety of the direct programs and service strategies used by Round one colleges. Overall it is apparent a large majority of direct strategies focused on student support services (such as student advising and counseling or tutoring services) or instructional supports (such as developmental courses in English, math and science. Only a quarter involved changes in classroom practices of faculty. These direct and instructional services are similar to the kinds of services provided by TRIO's SSS programming that provides low-income, first-generation students access to postsecondary education and tools to foster student success.

Figure 8: Popularity of Direct Program and Service Strategies: Percentage of Round One College that Implemented each type of Strategy under the Achieving the Dream Initiative



Source: Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges, Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011, p. 76.

How effective has ATD been in bringing about change in the participating community colleges? To investigate the impact of ATD, a study covering a five-year period (from 2004 to 2009) was launched. The study analyzed the impact of ATD on the first 26 community colleges that joined the initiative in 2004, which came from five states (Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) and which formally put into practice the five-step model illustrated in Figure 6. The first report draws on gathered information from field visits, surveys of college administrators and faculty, program documents and student achievement data answering the central questions of the designed student outcomes from the five indicators of the five-step model. ATD's report also attempted to capture how the new initiative was also affecting the community colleges ability to bring about student success in the way of college completion toward degree attainment.

The comprehensive approach of this five-year study provided many performance indicators. However, the performance indicators I am most interested in analyzing below are students' persistence and college completion, both for all community college students and for the subpopulation of low income first generation students (See Table 4). Table 4 provides the performance indicators of persistence rates and completion rates before the ATD initiative was implemented (a cohort of students' in 2002-2004) and three years after the ATD was implemented (a cohort in 2007) for two groups: (a) students who were Pell Grant recipients (a group primarily of low income and first generation students) and (b) another group who were not.

The results revealed in the table are exclusive to the students who were enrolled in the first round of community colleges that established their membership with the ATD initiative. The researchers assessed (a) persistence of cohorts' enrollment (measured either as enrollment in the fall of second year or their enrollment of at least on semester of the second year) and (b) students' ability to complete their credential by the end of second year (measured as completion of any credential, completion of an associate's degree, or completion of a certificate or diploma). In reviewing the data it reveals no significant difference in persistence and completion rates for the non- Pell grant recipients. Where there was noticeable (but small) improvement was amongst the Pell Grant recipients. This significant difference revealed itself in relation to both persistence and completion, in some areas (such as "completed a credential by the end of the second year") the difference was substantial.

Table 3: Change in Average Two-Year Performance Indicators from before the ATD initiative (2002-2004) to after (2007)

Performance Indicators	No Pell Grant Receipt			Pell Grant Receipt		
	2002-2004 Cohorts	2007 Cohort	Diff.	2002-2004 Cohorts	2007 Cohort	Diff.
Persistence (%)						
Enrolled in fall of second year	47.1	42.4	-4.6	52.1	55.3	3.1
Enrolled in at least one semester in second year	51.8	47.0	-4.8	57.6	61.7	4.1
Completions (%)						
Completed a credential by the end of the second year	7.3	6.2	-1.1	4.1	7.6	3.5 **
Completed an associate's degree	5.0	2.9	-2.1	2.3	4.1	1.8 *
Completed a certificate or diploma	2.3	3.4	1.1	1.8	3.6	1.8 *

Source: Turning the Tide: Five Year of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges, Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011, p. 138.

When reflecting on the Round one attempt to capture its infancy stages of results, it clearly is essential to acknowledge the enormous need for ATD culture of evidence amongst the community college communities. Prior to ATD launching in 2004 there was no meaningful consideration for institutional measures of student success (outside other grant based entities such as federal Title V or TRIO) other than the focus on providing student access. The Round one attempt to assess the theories of action behind ATD (and develop the culture of evidence) was monumental as it is a major step toward solidifying college communities actually accomplishing the overarching promise to support student success. While the Round one report of ATD revealed the complexities of attaining student gains in a relatively short period of time, those findings can inform further efforts. The overall conclusion of the five-year report was that ATD had a "positive effect on some student outcomes and no effect on others"; for example, it is evident that students receiving Pell Grant assistance have made small improvement in relation to their peer group. Also there were modest improvements in completion of gatekeeper English courses and completion of course work, but not for many other indicators such as average rates of persistence and graduation for all community college students (Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011 p.142).

In keeping with a focus on developing a culture of evidence, the report is reflective about shortcomings and ways to continue to improve the ATD Program. One limitation was that administrators were more involved than faculty and many of the innovations reached only a small group of students. The involvement of faculty and other educational practitioners in the execution of program strategies of increasing academic and social support systems for students was often marginal. Operationally, the implementation was fair at best and its efforts often failed to extend beyond first year students which had a measurable effect to the direct contact with other targeted populations to which the overall student achievement of the active cohorts being assessed had varied degree of influence (Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011).

Furthermore, when reviewing the central purpose of the Round one assessment of its effects on the 26 colleges, the outside evaluators found various levels of success in creating a culture of evidence within each institution. More specifically, the evaluation team classified 42 percent of the colleges as having achieving a strong culture of evidence because they had implemented most of the recommended practices, 38 percent of the colleges as having achieved some culture of evidence because they had implemented many of the recommended practices but not always to the same degree, and 19 percent as weak because they were still struggling to implement many of the recommended practices. When asked about how participation in ATD influenced their improvement, 73 percent (19 colleges out of 26) of the institutions thought participation in ATD influenced their development of culture of evidence. However, they also acknowledged the assistance of alternative grant programming within their institutions (Title V, and TRIO) whose principal focus is driven by student success and that these programs supported the college efforts to implement COE institutionally. It is also important to note that the strong dedication, commitment and leadership of the colleges' administrators to student achievement complemented and reinforced the overall "buy in" to support institutional development change (Rutschow, Richburg-Hayes, Grock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Reid-Kerrign, Jenkins, Gooden, and Martin, 2011).

Overall, despite the many challenges of the report, the emergence of the ATD ideology and methods appears to have created increased interests and respect for community colleges. The template in which to effectively address student success and support is a cut above other models. The positive movement of ATD appears to be in its early stages of mastering the ways and means of fostering community colleges to move from interventions that affect a small group of students to those that affect a large scale of students.

Bunker Hill Community College: A Case Study Experience

In my quest to better understand best practices in serving low-income, first-generation college students at Community Colleges, I wanted to get (a local) perspective on the impact of both TRIO SSS programming and ATD initiatives in improving success. Initially, my research aimed to review three local community colleges to survey their array of developmental educational programming, which also included TRIO's Upward Bound program. After meeting with several directors including my discussion with a director from Bunker Hill Community College, I modified my focus for my synthesis write-up toward understanding the best practices within TRIO's SSS developmental programming., in part because I was more interested in programming for an older population of low income first generation students and how to best provide educational guidance to enable students to identify educational directions that will support their employment and career aspirations. Thus, in this section I will discuss what I learned from my interview with the director of the TRIO SSS Program at Bunker Hill Community College. Bunker Hill was also of interest because it participates in ATD.

With an enrollment of more than 11,700 students and growing, BHCC has two campuses and four satellite locations within the Greater Boston area. BHCC is considered one of the most diverse institutions of higher education in Massachusetts, since six in ten students are people of color and more than half of BHCC's students are women (bhcc@edu, 2011). This illustration of a local community college was of interest on many levels as BHCC joined Achieving the Dream Community College Count initiative in 2007 and received $450,000 in grants to plan, launch and implement student success strategies designed to help more students -- principally low-income and first-generation. Aside from this feature of ATD initiative, the Director of the TRIO-SSS program at this school provided her insights to the longstanding competitive federal government grant that BHCC has retained for approximately 22 years (Interview with Bovill-Hawkins, 2011).

According to my interview with Margaret Bovill-Hawkins, Director of the TRIO-SSS at BHCC, students who are U.S. citizens and enrolled in a college, students who are low-income and first in their family to go to college, or students who have disabilities and display academic need may submit an application to participate in the TRIO SSS program. Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins did not offer any insight to the literature's claim that many eligible students are not accepted due to the limited slots due to federal expenditures. However, similar to my employment experience with TRIO programming, she indicated students who initiate any interest in program are not usually turned away. In general, Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins stated that each year the Bunker Hill Community College offers an orientation (prior to or during the beginning of each academic year) which orientate students to the TRIO's SSS programming and how eligible students can participate. From orientation, academic advisers and word of mouth, students find their way into the TRIO's SSS program at BHCC. As it relates to the size of BHCC TRIO SSS program, Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins is contracted to serve 100 students throughout each semester every year. Retrospectively, I now realize in my interview of Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins, I was not able to fully explore the realm of the number of student served, or how students are selected, and especially her perspective about increasing the number of students who participate in the program. These issues would be important; to explore given the literature states many qualified low-income, first-generation students do not partake of these programs. These questions are reflective of where my work in progress still remains to fully understand how to improve the effectiveness of these aspects of TRIO's practices.

In addition, the question was asked, how does the TRIO-SSS program measure student success? According to Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins, BHCC-SSS primarily measures its student success by student retention and graduation/program completion rates. She also expressed that, ultimate success is acknowledged through the students' persistence to transfer to a four-year education institution and the students' ability to attain a bachelor degree or a certificate. In relation to the time for low-income, first-generation students' to graduate from their studies, it was interesting to hear the Director of BHCC-TRIO's SSS express the time requirements (projective of four to five years combination of completing 2-year and transferring to a 4-year college) of attaining the degree as most of the literature agrees that most low-income, first-generation college students take longer to attain degrees than their counterparts.

The findings from the National Study of Student Support Services (Chaney et al., 1997) offer interesting insights to TRIO's SSS service delivery and how it can affect students' retention, persistence, and graduation rate. In actuality, I discovered and read about these findings after I had interviewed Margaret Bovill-Hawkins, the Director of the TRIO-SSS at BHCC. However, when interviewing her, I asked, "In your opinion, what program elements or methods best foster student persistence?" According to Bovill-Hawkins both intrusive advising and interactive engagement with peers are crucial. She qualified her answer by explaining that intrusive advising helps to stay on top of, if not ahead of, the potential obstacles to student success. Furthermore, Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins explained that interactive engagement allows students to support their peers through experiential learning, common goals and interests.

When posing the question about the overall measurement of success, Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins notes, "While the stats show that each year the SSS program is steadily increasing its retention, degree completion, and transfer goals, the overall goal has room for improvement." It is apparent from my interview and my years of working collaboratively with Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins, she holds herself to a higher standard of success exceeding the standard success measurements from the federal grant. .She emphasized, she would ultimately like to see her students take advantage of more services to improve their academic exposure (through the learning communities) which would enhance their successful outcomes and possibly relieve their additional educational pressures. In addition, Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins underscored that her TRIO's SSS program is being proactive in relation to increasing the retention, transfer, and graduation rates by increasing programmatic operations to support the goals of learning communities. Similar to the findings from the National Study of Student Support Services (Chaney et al, 1997). Bunker Hill Community has embraced learning communities as an important and effective intervention strategy. Learning communities can take a variety of forms, but they focus on creating "learning teams," a form of cooperative learning. Students may participate in workshops, seminars and small group discussions with other students; in addition some forms of peer counseling, tutoring, specialized courses, and mentoring programs are considered forms of the general strategy of creating "learning communities." Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins added that the TRIO SSS program is also increasing the utilization of more services by commuting students, and adding staff that are more knowledgeable in meeting the needed student services such as success coaches, peer mentors and tutors. She evaluates her program's overall success as having "marginal success," primarily meeting the national average; however, she would like to see elevated improvements that would allow for performance that exceeds average markings. She states student attendance, persistence, retention is up, and she credits her team-driven approach for the sustainability of the students continues participation. She underscored that the work is vast and without the collaborative and cooperative spirit of her team the program would not operate effectively.

Overall, I am inspired by Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins' fortitude and dedication to serve the students of Bunker Hill Community College; her staff and the TRIO program mission are also outstanding. In my interview, I found her dedication and commitment to providing services to transform students' lives to be outstanding. In my opinion she is the exact prototypical empathic practitioner who can best serve low-income, first-generation students in overcoming their educational barriers. On many occasions I have been able to converse with her about her professional expertise and she has always provided her honest opinions.

From these conversations I have felt confident in recruiting numerous students to Bunker Hill Community College and entrusted them to her care (and continue to do so) because I know what she will offer them will go beyond the program mission. Her program in general provides students who participate with a safe haven, a point of reference to address any matters that might be of any threat to the student not succeeding. I believe Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins' heartfelt demeanor as well as her years of expertise of serving students has generated success within her program.

As in any process to striving for excellence it requires changes and those changes require some time. Ultimately, I appreciated the time I was able to arrange to formally address a subject, which is of a great concern to me and how I might be creative within my practices in fostering success for the students I am serving. Creativity comes in many forms; however, my most creative attribute is expanding my network basis. This network is establishing a professional alliance to which I can converse with many educational professionals who might have different resources and insight to deal with supportive services and proven best practices within their educational establishment. This would allow me to refer students to sources of assistance as well will as provide myself with storehouse of knowledge of practical solutions that allow for me to be a catalyze change.

Unfortunately, due to time restrictions in Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins' schedule, she was not able to resume additional talks to allow me to learn more specifically about how the ATD initiative has affected her program directly or indirectly. It is my intention to follow-up with some of these questions with her at a later time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 3 provided insights as to how low-income, first-generation students should interface with the community college communities by considering the core question, "What are the best practices to helping low-income, first-generation students attain their degrees?"

TRIO's programming has been around since the late 1960's when the federal government established educational initiatives to support low-income and first-generation students. Chapter 3 assessed how the process of providing supplemental instruction along with extensive outreach might create the difference needed to help student reach their educational goals. TRIO's SSS program serves students in postsecondary educational institutions including community colleges which many low-income, first-generations student attend. It was interesting to discover from the literature that many students' who qualify for the services go missed and unserved. This finding leads me to believe there is room for additional programs that ensure this sub-population has every opportunity to attain the services needed to reaching their educational goals. Students who are able to participate in TRIO's SSS service are better able to persist and eventually attain their bachelor degrees. Interestingly the success rate meets the federal standards; the data also show TRIO students are more successful from their peers and or similar populations who were unable to participate in TRIO's services.

The community college has to be inventive in serving all students and citizens. Community colleges strive to serve all students better, a concerned community formalized by a constituency concerned with the low success rate of students matriculating within the community college systems. This constituency devised the initiative known as Achieve the Dream, a movement conceived in 2004. It was my charge to review the contribution of a new initiative offered to community colleges and highlight the benefits as to how it may help students succeed. ATD is a new initiative formulated within the community colleges, and although the first formal evaluation reports reveal only limited effects, I think it is poised to have more favorable results given more time and research. The second round of reporting is due in 2012 that may better reveal the effects of initiative.

Reviewing the aforementioned question at a service level, this chapter concluded by highlighting how Massachusetts's largest local community college participates both within TRIO and the ATD initiative to examine how it fares in relation to what is reported in the literature. Did the director see any positive influence of TRIO and ATD?

Interestingly, the practice outwardly mirrors the research literature. My process of interviewing Margaret Bovill-Hawkins, Director of TRIO's Student Support Services at Bunker Hill Community College, provided interesting insights into what has been theorized versus what is actually being practiced. One thing is clear – there is still more work to be done in the quest to serve the low-income, first-generation populations.

What was brought to the surface in examining the methods of best practices is how the ATD initiative is fine-tuning its direct service subdivision of its work and building on what TRIO government-funded programming identified nearly forty years ago. Simply put, the best way to serve low-income, first-generation students is by meeting them where they are at! TRIO SSS has mastered the template of serving students effectively as illustrated in Pacchetti's (2009) list of programming interventions that have short and long-term effects of students' success. Within the list it was noted services areas such as "peer tutoring, cultural events, workshops and instructional courses were particularly effective methods of increasing GPAs, retention rates and the number of credits earned" (Pacchetti, 2009, p. 36).

In my next and concluding chapter, I reflect more deeply on my research findings. From my reflections, I will redirect my vocational attentions to what I learned from my research effects and how I will develop a practitioner action plan based on a proactive methodology of how I would like to serve this subgroup more effectively toward the goal of attaining a degree.

CHAPTER 4

REALIZING THE DREAM

My desire to serve families by encouraging them to expand their personal and vocational development has been the foundation of my working mission. Assisting individuals and families—in three different regions of the United States—whose similar characteristics are connected to poverty, missed opportunity, and hopelessness has led me to investigate what are the most helpful alternatives to resetting their direction. How do you foster support for individuals who have fallen through the cracks, who are underserved, and who in many cases are ignored and treated like an unrecognized member of society?

My synthesis was my first formal attempt at what I expect will be many more efforts to come, of exploring how to assist at-risk youth and families who are low-income, first-generation prospective college students. I realize that every at-risk individual I come in contact with will not necessarily envision themselves navigating an educational pathway. Thus my synthesis focuses entirely on those who have realized their life pattern will not yield them the future result they desire without taking constructive actions such as increasing their knowledge, skills, and ultimately their earning potential, and hence who choose to pursue a college degree. Ultimately, I am always eager to foster rediscovery of a sense of purpose and prospective vocational identification, among the individuals who have found themselves in hard times and who might seek my services. Although my synthesis enabled me to focus specifically on best educational practices to help this sub-population succeed, it is always my desire to provoke self-reflection in fostering self-sufficiency among all individuals I might be able to assist with alternative options in their financial, educational and vocational struggles.

My Synthesis Journey

Given my desire to assist the families I have served in finding a meaningful solution of a fitting vocational pathway, the purpose of my synthesis was to examine the current trends and practices of how colleges and universities are successfully serving low-income students who are the first in their families to enroll in college. My journey of exploring what is successful for first-generation learners was a process that required me to discover who these students are, then understand the many challenges first-generation learners face in their initial engagement of attending college, to lastly exploring models of educational support (the review of the longstanding TRIO programming and a newer institutional approach of fostering student success, ATD within the 2-year college structure) that are designed to help students who lack the preparedness necessary to succeed.

The peaks and valleys of my process seemed at times insurmountable as the vast literature on the subject was beyond what I expected. Throughout my synthesis progress I felt overwhelmed as I had a sense I was trying to take on more than I was capable of digesting in the given time to complete my project. At the same time I was also excited by the enormous interest among published research scholars in my chosen subject. It was easy, however, to become distracted by a host of relevant factors such as research on the historical factors in the development of community colleges to serve low-income, first-generation students or, the historical progression of developmental education programming and its effects on the chosen populations or even an entire report on TRIO's multiple programs and how each individual program best serves the underserved students it targets.

During this stage of my process I reflected on how the skills I attained in critical and creative thinking assisted in allowing me to best clarify, organize, and synthesize my principal focus. The Processes of Research and Engagement course taught me the usefulness of censoring topics by narrowing the focus to the subject of specific interest. For example, in the early stages of my synthesis, I believed I wanted to research how postsecondary education used tools such as student orientations to assist students in their first year of college. When I started exploring aspects of these experiences for the first-year student, I realized I needed to isolate the particular population of students I was most interested in supporting. It was at this point I reconsidered my research efforts by asking who the students I was most concerned in targeting are. I settled on low-income first-generation college students, and in the midst of doing so, I still came to realize I could narrow my search even further to low-income, first-generation college students who start at community colleges and are ethnic minorities.

An additional area of illumination within my research journey was the process of exploring the many characteristics of low-income, first-generation college students and these students' specific needs. During this stage of my research I was fascinated with the many theories within the research about risk factors for not obtaining a BA and the numerous student barriers to success in college, which I found thought-provoking when comparing my own observations about barriers to the research about proven barriers.

Further enlightenment (as well as challenges to my thinking) occurred as my research addressed the specific risk factors for low-income, first-generation students and the low likelihood of their earning a degree. The statistics show those low-income, first-generation college students who start at community college and must transfer to four-year college to ultimately attain their bachelor's degree are not as successful as a similar population who first enroll in a four year university. The limited number of cases of success, especially for those enrolled part-time in community colleges, was sobering, as my research had helped in solidifying the realization of the necessary work that is needed to actually support students to attaining their degrees. It was at this stage of my research I began to question if I had what it took to foster change. In that moment I accurately comprehended that my quest to be a catalyst for change would need to be rooted in a thorough evaluation of the research if I were to be effective.

As a CCT scholar, I critically examined the research on the effects of a traditional developmental educational program, the SSS program design of TRIO, which I personally was able to benefit from within my own educational progression. As a former participant in the program, I have first-hand knowledge of its importance to me, although my experience was starting at a 4-year institution rather than a community college, and most of the students I am interested in helping will start at community colleges. I entered a 4-year college immediately after high school; I then dropped out after two semesters (due to the demands of the many obligations of being a single parent in conjunction with a lack of educational guidance and support) and with a renewed determination I returned to college three years later. Through an associate who was a member of the church I was attending, I was introduced to TRIO's services. From my introduction to the program I visited the offices to enquire about services I might get involved with and immediately I was assigned to an academic counselor who thereafter was exceptional in supporting my academic progression to my graduation. My college experience was highly affected by my introduction to the TRIO program, which in turn instrumentally effected my educational development and progression to attaining my bachelor's degree.

My first-hand experience as an undergraduate included being involved with a TRIO program that had wrap-around services, which means there were several programs within the same department and as a student I took full advantage of all services that pertained to my educational needs. The Multi-Cultural Affairs was the office I visited on a weekly basis. Within the office it provided all five of TRIO's service programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Service, Education Opportunity Center and Ronald E, McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program). It was extremely helpful to participate in the host of programming the Multi-Cultural Affairs' office offered such as attending many of the academic workshops and all the cultural workshops and events, attending a foundation class that oriented students to all services on campus, as well as enrolling in liberal art classes such as English, math along with any other course within my degree, that were taught by TRIO's program staff who were qualified faculty.

My personal experience with TRIO program was extended by serving in TRIO programs at two different college communities (one campus in a rural mid-western city and another in an urban east-coastal city), but again was in 4-year institutions. Through employment, as a practitioner of the TRIO Upward Bound at the University of Nebraska and Pace University I was able to provide the support that offers students progressive targeted developmental educational services that facilitate and promote educational growth. In my tenure at UNL I worked closely with students, exposing them to art education and cultural workshops and events. At Pace University, I worked indirectly with students, working more directly with parents of graduating seniors with fundraising efforts to help students with transitional expenses from high school to college. During this critical time I served families with informational sessions on scholarship exploration and financial aid applications.

My work with TRIO SSS has also been as a collaborating practitioner, in some cases working within postsecondary educational settings (community college and University) and in other cases working within a non-profit agency supporting adult learners transitioning in either a community college and in some cases students who have transferred into a 4-year college. Through my educational and training programming within my current non-profit work, I would often accompany students to SSS programs and help them connect with the staff to gain access to services; in addition to exposing students to these services, I invited TRIO's SSS Directors to come to panel discussions, college fairs, and workshops I facilitated regarding students' interest in pathways to college. Through these collaborations I witnessed how TRIO's-SSS program highlighted service areas that benefited low-income, first-generation students with college completion and preparation for transfer to ensure their sustained studies toward postsecondary education in four-year institution and their attainment of bachelor's degree.

I was therefore interested and pleased to learn from the various literatures about the effectiveness of TRIO's SSS program that peer tutoring, cultural events, workshops and instructional courses were found to be particularly effective for increasing GPAs, retention rates along with increasing the credits earned by students who participated. Assisting low-income, first-generation students in utilizing the beneficial resources of financial and guidance counseling are important in promoting students' completion of their studies at two-year college to their transfer and completion of their studies and attainment of a bachelor's degree in a four-year college. The research firmly states it is favorable to attaining their educational goal when partaking in supplemental education services such as what TRIO provides and that those students did better than their counterparts who were eligible for but did not participate in TRIO.

At the same time, some aspects of the data surprised me. For example, the effects on GPA and retention were often moderate not large, which might reflect both complexity of the problems as well as the limited nature of some interventions. Further, in spite of the meaningful service delivery from the TRIO SSS program, it was perplexing to discover the unmet need such that due to limiting federal expenditures only a small number of students from the target population could benefit from the valuable services of TRIO's SSS programming. This part of the literature was puzzlingly to me, as in my experience with TRIO programs, no students were turned away. Within my involvement with the program it was regularly practiced to serve any student who visited the office regardless if they were registered or not, but I now realize this doesn't mean "everyone is served." Many are invisible to the system or don't show up. It is not too clear from the literature whether many students from the targeted population were simply unaware of the services and did not enroll, or the service centers did not bother to document additional student beyond the allotted hundred students permitted within each program. This uncertainty generates additional questions as to how the students who are unable to be served by TRIO's programming can be helped and where can they go to get alternative programs that aim to serve students educational advancement. This question is left for me to ponder in further exploration on this matter.

An innovative best practice featured in the literature – that of using teaching or learning communities to enhance students' improvement -- is a practice I was familiar with from my association with TRIO's programming. The structure of a learning community allows for cooperative learning among students and is one effective way TRIO uses to enhance students' academic improvement. Ultimately, the concept is that several minds thinking differently and collectively provide a wealth of alternative viewpoints which promotes students' critical thinking.

The concept of learning groups is specifically beneficial in the TRIO's SSS services delivery to low-income, first-generation students, effectively providing a connective learning community within the college communities. However, I discovered I was equally captivated by a model of success from an institutional viewpoint. I was particularly fascinated with an institutional approach to serve student success rooted in my personal philosophy of serving individuals from a holistic position. I am a strong believer that the process of solving most human resource dilemmas is connected to the involved communities' ability to come together as a whole and work cooperatively. I have learned in my numerous attempts to work from within my circle of influence that I cannot always make the greatest impact on the lives of the people I am serving without the teamwork of the other members of the unit; their input enables me to provide connective services. In other words, my mission in the group is one part of the many parts of the necessary services to helping individuals adapt to their life changes. For example, in a recent case of services I provide for homeless individuals as a housing specialist, if the case worker did not service families with employment and or educational efforts, it was impossible for me to help families with sustaining themselves in permanent housing. In most cases in my work relations, if the administrative bodies were not working collaboratively with the managers and staff, it is impossible to accomplish the agency's or educational service's objectives. It takes the collaborative efforts of the entire team to successfully accomplish the intend goals.

Knowing this fact from the observation of my professional endeavors, I realize that I can't be a catalyst of change alone. I can be more effective when part of a larger group. Researching the Achieve the Dream institutional model and its motto "success begets success," reflected an approach to success that involved all the practicing personnel including the students. Senator Hillary Clinton once quoted an African prophet who said, "It takes a village to raise a child." As that quote resonates with me in my own daily mission to serve families, I also found that the ATD approach to supporting low-income, first-generation college student success within a 2-year college toward completion of students' studies and transfer to a 4-year college thought-provoking and inspiring. The statistical information gathered about the effects of this initiative on retention and graduation was sobering and somewhat limited as this national non-profit movement only recently emerged in 2004, which makes analyzing results a bit premature. I realize that change is often a slow, incremental process. ATD's innovative approach to monitoring and surveying students' intermediate milestones is very similar to a research technique I acquired in my CCT studies. The technique of action research acts as a similar strategy as ATD and allows one to keep revising and adjusting one's approach in light of closely monitoring the fundamental changes that occur. The mere practice of monitoring change requires fact finding and inquiry and reflection, similar to the action research model. Interestingly enough action research allows for research from a collaborative effort among colleagues searching for solutions in a community.

The promising change of ATD is still under-construction and as an upcoming annual report is due in the beginning of 2012, I will position myself to review outcome. However, I thought it was important to survey the actual practice of TRIO's SSS programming in a community college setting working in the early stages of implementing the ATD practices.

Unfortunately, I was not able to fully engage in a discussion that would allow me to compare and contrast the TRIO's program efforts to the new implementation of the institutional approach of ATD; however, I was able to explore a Director's views of the challenges in monitoring the program's delivery of services and how that service directly affected the students. My profound moment in this process of doing a case study at Bunker Hill Community College was the opportunity to reunite with Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins a professional colleague with whom I have worked closely in the past by referring many students to her program. BHCC has a favorable reputation of taking care of the students who enroll in the college. In my opportunity to meet with Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins in this project, she expressed her desire to improve her programs in area of expanding services (such as additional learning communities) and expanding her staff (such as utilizing the services of additional staff, more specifically, success coaches and peer mentors/tutors). Ultimately, my strong collaboration with Mrs. Bovill-Hawkins serves as a valuable resource in my continuing practice to serve students and my ability to network with seasoned practitioners.

Still I Rise- Transitioning into Future Works

The information I gathered from both student success models was beneficial. The review of statistical outcomes and proven practices has strengthened my desire to explore further practices within additional areas to enhance ways I might serve at-risk individuals. The information that was gathered by doing this synthesis will allow me to be even more mindful in my advocacy efforts to provoke meaningful transformation among the students I serve. Furthermore, the principles of best practices my research revealed were in line with my professional practices and hypotheses about what are the necessary ingredients to foster student success. I especially valued TRIO's list of common and successful practices and ATD's structure of a culture of evidence, along with a collaborative working team approach to student success. As I continue my work serving these students, I will draw from both programs to foster a meaningful infrastructure to promote and support student success.

Fact finding has it place and I realize it is a continual effort, but now the real work of incorporating findings into my practice along with actually testing my own designs and models of successful practices must begin. In subsequent work, I plan to advance my efforts in formulating a model of educational programming that would aim to address low-income, minorities, first-generation students who enter community colleges.

Although the research has clearly established that students coming from the targeted population have similar challenges, are faced with similar risk factors and have similar educational and family background, my practitioner experiences have demonstrated that a "one size fits all" approach is not useful as the target population has a wealth of interesting attributes amongst the individual students base. I have also seen at the ground level that the seeming lack of effort, lack of motivation, and simply the lack of interest among low-income, first-generation students stand as barriers toward seeing the greatness that is within. Therefore, I conclude that a central part of any effective program involves not just the support and transformation of institutions, but also the support of fundamental transformations in student thinking and empowerment. Prospective low-income first generation students need support to explore and recognize their personal growth and to engage in self-reflection.

The reflective practice of helping others help themselves has it responsibilities. Personally, I have found fostering change requires a commitment to support the holistic and unique needs of the individuals you aim to support. I aim to formulate a brand in which I might help foster students thinking to prompt their individual personal transformation of their chosen life goals. Within my practice I would strive to integrate reflective tools within all teaching and learning group sessions that would highlight themes with which the students were presently struggling to support the students' fundamental transformation. One learning model I have explored that I think can be particularly effective for these students is from the book, *The Power of Focus*. This model focuses on leadership in general; however, it proposes a diagram, "The Consistency Circle," (see Figure 8, which will be discussed later) which is one example I have used to promote insightful transformational change to low-income, first-generation students at Roxbury Community College. Assisting individuals with managing their personal development I believe is beneficial in fostering a healthy society of thriving students, families, and citizens which makes for a productive nation. Likewise, students who are able to have the opportunities to reflect on the meaningfulness of their actions and life choices might be able to adapt to the numerous pressures and challenges associated with succeeding through attaining their education. Thus my programming would aim to commit students to lifelong learning as a means of promoting their lifelong successful endeavors. This approach is similar to the explored student success models, as a commitment to meeting student needs was fundamental to how TRIO and Achieve the Dream, addressed the suitable best practices within its models of success. This model servers as a supplemental effort to support the efforts to promote students in succeeding their educational goals; however, this added feature helps make it meaningful to students so they can understand and embrace their responsibility in helping others (students that might be struggling they come in contact with) during and after they have accomplished their educational goals.

In the spirit of giving back, in my continual work of helping students' navigate successful solutions to life's problems, I acknowledge that there are many worthwhile educational paths for students who are exploring their suitable vocational pathway through the means of education (such as students who pursue other vocations trades that do not require a bachelor degree); ultimately, students need to be empowered to make effective choices for themselves. Given our nation's workforce pool is enormous; there is a lot to consider to supporting students' individual growth as it relates to their personal and education development.

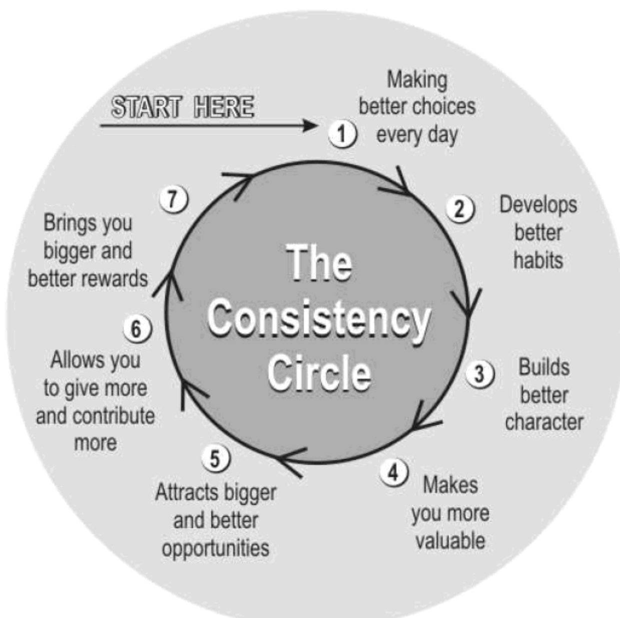
Above all, my desire to empower low-income, first-generation students to embrace the unusual and untraditional path within their families of attaining their education will remain constant within the forefront of my mission in my professional placement. Moreover, I now realize that helping a generation of students who historically might have not been valued or even considered a legitimate people in the society at large is extremely challenging.

So the concluding question becomes: How can I help best students "realize their dream?" Having walked the same road as many low-income, first-generation students, I understand that many educational practitioners may not be able to appropriately or enthusiastically embrace, the untapped genius of these students, who are often diamonds in the rough. I am inspired to support students who are hungry to realize their greatness. From my invested mission—a direct care approach of optimism that is rooted in empowerment—I often reflect on a methodology I have designed to assist in my practice of helping all individuals in crises. In this methodology, I mentally image a scale, one side measures, "How much am I helping?" and the other, "How much am I enabling?" Both amounts are suspended and compared, and as each situational "problem" is presented, a systematic effort of meaningful consideration is taken into account of the individual person's circumstances, and from that assessment, a plan of action is considered as to the best method and/or response to helping that person. This mental model of fostering balance among the students and families I serve is informed by the notion that it is virtually impossible to help people gain power (growth and development) if practitioners do not allow student to actively confront whatever adversity they may be experiencing at the time (in other-words, individuals need to own their situations by recognizing they make certain life choices that affect their current dilemma, which in turn could help them critically think about future decisions that can have lasting effects). In my opinion the cornerstone of empowerment is giving people the power to choose. In translating this method of help for low-income, first-generation students, I have integrated the method of helping students receive solid information so they can make solid decisions as it relates to their education growth and development. This could be as simple as informing students that their test scores are not favorable for taking a class they were planning to enroll in and providing them an alternative that will support their successful progression to future courses.

Fundamentally, my thinking about the importance of self-empowerment (as a necessary part of the process of helping bring about change) has already been informed by many inspirational authors and academic scholars. My own personal, professional and educational endeavors have lead me to seek out literature that addresses learning methods of transformational change, such as Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle Centered Leadership*, Daniel Goleman's *Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence and Primal Leadership*, and Abraham Maslow's *Motivation and Personality,* which feature the Hierarchy of Motivational Needs Model. For example, in a recent workshop I facilitated at Roxbury Community College working with low-income, first-generation enrolled in a Corporate and

Community Education certificate program, I highlighted Canfield, Hanson, and Hewitt's book *The Power of Focus* (2000). Their theories have led me to believe that once an individual experiences some degree of success through personal or professional accomplishment, an individual should adopt the motto that "Successful people have successful habits, where unsuccessful people don't." I have especially valued the illustration of this concept through, "The Consistency Circle." This model has a circular process of seven stages (see Figure 8). The consistency of performance automatically creates a better future and the "Consistency Circle" is an endless circle of development.

Figure 9: The Consistency Circle



Resource: The Power of Focus, Canfield, Hansen and Hewitt, 2000 p6.

In the model, personal development is fostered when individuals can review and monitor each step of making better choices, which in turn promotes better habits. In the model of building students' personal development, the maturity of students' constructing better habits produces better character. When you have better character, it adds more value to oneself, family, community, and one's ultimate contribution to society. When one becomes more valuable, it attracts bigger and better opportunities. This allows an individual to make more of a contribution to life. This in turns leads to bigger and better results. Interestingly, this feature of the model of promoting personal development is similar to the 5-step model of ATD. Both models build on students' progression through a sequence of sub goals which act as building blocks; once the student completes one step they are better able to advance to the next step.

I featured this material in a workshop, entitled Personal and Family Strength to students at Roxbury Community College in an attempt to enable students to start to envision their personal decision to change. The object of the workshop was to help student's participate in an educational environment in relation to their present conditions of being housed in a shelter, unemployed and in some cases students who had not be in a classroom setting for over ten years. The specific exposure to the Consistency Circle helps students to be reflective about their current change of attending class and how their participation might motivate them to change their personal habits and to embrace their personal development as a means to receiving a personal transformation.

My observation of what was gained by using these materials of the "Consistency Circle" differed between cohorts. Some students had difficulty with understanding or embracing it, but for others, who perhaps had reflected on some aspect on their life's decisions prior to group discussions; it generated more interest to better understand themselves. As a result these students asked if they could continue group discussion in the next class meeting. Further, those students for whom the material resonates were better able to tap into areas of their self- determination and resilience and to gain an overall sense of relentlessness to stay the course of accomplishing their goals. This was evident in how they conducted themselves in class and how they took direct ownership of their educational affairs (such as reflecting on their future plans and taking direct action to future their educational development).

Ultimately, it is my charge as I move forward on my quest of serving low-income, first-generation college students, and individuals in general, to continue my exploration of human potential, particularly in discovering how to promote their self-discovery and self-determination which in turn might have a significant impact in enabling students in achieving their purpose. In addition, I look forward to my own continuing transformation on a path of life-long learning. I hope my desire to be a catalyst of change allows me to make a difference in any vocational environment—be it educational, non-profit, or government—enabling me to directly foster my vision of motivating human growth and development.

The challenge of this quest will be longstanding, and viewing its unique attributes will allow for many reflective interventions. As a practitioner who constantly strives for excellence, I will be a "stand-in" to help students understand the logic of their journey, along with the possible rewards for their hard work and ultimately the payoff of their commitment to finish what they started.

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