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Supportive Measures: A Grounded Theory Analysis Of The Needs And Aspirations Of First-Generation College Students Enrolled In The Federally-Funded Trio Student Support Services (sss) Program At A Community College In Rural Kentucky

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SUPPORTIVE MEASURES: A GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS OF THE NEEDS AND
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FUNDED TRIO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (SSS) PROGRAM AT A COMMUNITY
COLLEGE IN RURAL KENTUCKY

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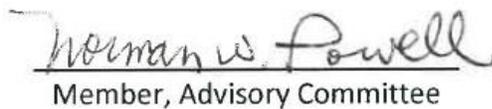
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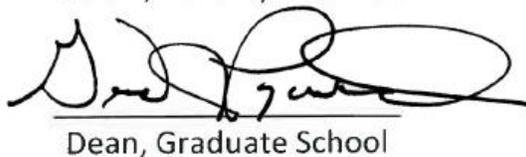
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ABSTRACT

For more than forty-nine years (since 1968) the federally-funded TRIO Student

Support Services (SSS) programs have served disadvantaged students across the United

States of America by providing wrap-around services to further the progress of their

enrollment in postsecondary educational opportunities. The SSS program aims to assist

students with disabilities, and who identify as low-income and first-generation (LIFG)

college students, towards the successful completion of certification in a technical

program and an undergraduate level degree from either a two or four-year college or

university.

This study evaluated the needs and aspirations of [ten] first-generation college

students at the point-of-entry of enrollment into the TRIO SSS program as participants

of the summer bridge program in 2017 at a community college in rural Kentucky. The

summer bridge program provides student participants of the TRIO SSS program a

jumpstart on their college experience and serves as an additional boost to students who

enrolled in the program during the 2017 spring semester. The primary investigator (PI)

employed a grounded theory research methodology to analyze the needs and

aspirations of the ten TRIO SSS students at the point-of-entry into the SSS program and

how the perspective of the student directly aligns with the objectives of the community

college's SSS program grant.

There are four major themes which emerged from the analysis of the individual

interview sessions and personal statements taken from the student's SSS application at

the point-of-entry into the program. The first theme is the focus on self and the specific

goals of wanting to accomplish postsecondary enrollment (PSE) and postsecondary

degree attainment (PSA). The second theme is the focus on family, with one-fourth of

the students articulating the desire to be a role model for present and future

generations. The third theme is the enthusiasm of the student and the pride that comes

from being a first-generation college student. The final theme is the perspective of the

student about their future which extends beyond postsecondary enrollment and

postsecondary degree attainment. The implications of the themes and the resulting

theory for TRIO SSS program management and federal policy are presented for the

benefit of potential modification of program services in the next fifty years. Suggestions

for further research are also provided.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs and aspirations of ten

students who identified as first-generation (FG) college students enrolled in the

federally-funded TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program at a community college in

rural Kentucky. TRIO SSS provides wrap-around services to low-income and first-

generation (LIFG) college students to augment their postsecondary enrollment (PSE) and

attainment (PSA). The United States (U.S.) legislation had considered the student's

needs and aspirations to be against the federally-funded TRIO program objectives (EOA,

1964), however, this study sought to evaluate the student's aspirations (the student's

view of their future) from the onset of their TRIO experience while enrolled at the

community college. By exploring the needs and aspirations of the [ten] students at the

initial enrollment into the TRIO SSS program, the study attempted to shed light on *who*

the FG college students truly are based on their self-reported anticipated challenges,

fears, dreams, hopes, needs, and triumphs despite the disadvantages that qualified

them as eligible to receive services rendered by the TRIO SSS program.

For this study the researcher defines the term "aspiration" as being grounded in

the goals of the individual student and is used broadly to address their desire to earn an

undergraduate degree; find employment to meet their economic needs; set a standard

of learning for their children, siblings and extended family members; help their

extended family and households improve financially; or provide advancement

opportunities in their current career. The data is compiled from supporting

documentation from the ten student participants' completed TRIO SSS applications used

to determine enrollment eligibility into the program, and research questions and

conversations conducted during individual interview sessions at the onset of enrollment

into the TRIO SSS program during the 2017 summer bridge session. The application for

admission into the TRIO SSS program includes self-reported information regarding

income (the latest federal tax form is a requirement of the application for verification

purposes only), demographics, and anticipated personal and academic needs. The

applicant was also asked upon enrollment into the program if they understood the

expectations of the program and completed a student agreement which addressed

questions about their individual goals for postsecondary degree attainment. In cases

where the student may be under the age of 18, the parent was also asked to sign the

agreement to confirm their understanding of the TRIO SSS program, and their

commitment to uphold the expectations of the program while enrolled at the

community college.

For nearly fifty years the federally-funded TRIO SSS program has served students

across the U.S. The program was authorized in 1968 by the (amended) Higher Education

Act (HEA) of 1965 as reported by the United States Department of Education (USDE,

2018). TRIO programs are offered to disadvantaged students in secondary education

(sixth through twelfth grades) as a college preparation opportunity and then continue at

the college level to support PSE and the successful completion of PSA. The United States

Department of Education (USDE, 2018) defines TRIO as service and outreach programs

which are designed to provide educational assistance to students from underrepresented populations who identify as either low-income and first-generation (LIFG). For the TRIO SSS program, a documented disability is also a qualifier for eligibility of program services. Per the most recent Annual Performance Report (APR) as reported by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) for the last grant cycle ending in the year 2014, there were 949 TRIO Student Support Services grants which provided services to over 194,400 participants throughout the United States (USDE, 2018). The new grant cycle for TRIO SSS began September 1, 2015, and will run through August 31, 2020. All TRIO SSS programs will have to re-write and submit for funding in the academic year 2019-2020 to compete for refunding for an additional five years (USDE, 2018).

Background to the Study

Like many other students (traditional and non-traditional), the students who participate in the TRIO SSS program aspire for their future; however, many lack the assistance of someone who has graduated from a four-year institute as a support. Parents of FG college students inability to relate to the college experience and culture present challenges in communication and as a support in postsecondary education (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins & Serrata, 2016). At the point-of-entry into the college and the TRIO SSS program, very little is known about a student's needs, aspirations, and motivation. All of these variables affect retention and successful completion of their desired certification, diploma, or a degree from the college (Community and Technical College in Rural Kentucky, 2014).

This study sought to evaluate what the student imagined their college experience would be at the point-of-entry into the TRIO SSS program and whether or not the student's aspirations were related to the objectives of the federally-funded TRIO SSS program grant. This information is pertinent because it will provide insight into how to better serve the FG college student, as well as how to improve upon the program services provided. A desired outcome of the study was to make lucid the needs and aspirations of FG college students and how their statements could aid with the development of future objectives of the grant.

Problem Statement

First-generation college students are 25% less likely than their peers to graduate within six years of enrollment at four-year colleges and universities and four years of enrollment at two-year colleges (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018). At the point-of-entry into postsecondary education, there is little knowledge about a student's needs, aspirations, and motivation, all of which affect persistence and retention, and successful completion of academic goals. The barriers to FG college student success at the college level, including persistence, retention, and achievement, have been assessed by many scholars (Lile, Ottusch, Jones, & Richards, 2017; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016), however, research about the aspirations of first-generation college students in postsecondary education remains underdeveloped. This underdevelopment is significant because a student's aspirations are imperative to postsecondary attainment (PSA).

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Additionally, career goals, potential wages, and other outcomes that would either positively or adversely affect the student's future are equally important. There are studies which research why students enroll in college and scope out the characteristics of disadvantaged students and the barriers they face regarding PSE, PSA, and persistence and retention (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien, 2006; Morey & Johnson, n.d.; Mortenson, 2011), however, there are very few studies which consider the unmet needs which prevent students from successfully achieving their desired academic goals (Stieha, 2010).

Purpose Statement of Research

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs and aspirations of first-generation college students enrolled in the federally-funded TRIO SSS program at the point-of-entry into postsecondary education, through an exploration of themes that present from self-reported statements. The statements were obtained during individual interview sessions and from comments written on the student's TRIO SSS program application for support of PSE and PSA. The evaluation was conducted within the context of the purpose of the TRIO SSS program per the guidelines of the U.S. federal legislation.

Significance of the Study

The study examined the emerging themes from the individual interview sessions with ten of the newly enrolled FG TRIO SSS participants. The study went further to determine the extent to which the presented themes supported the objectives of the

TRIO SSS program. Investigation of topics presented during the study could help to refine the objectives of the federally-funded grant program to better align with the expectations the students have for the TRIO SSS program at the start of their enrollment in postsecondary education.

The study could potentially provide information to the college's TRIO SSS program for the benefit of serving newly enrolled students of the program and the community college overall. Gaining a deeper understanding of the FG college student's aspirations could be of use when examining the specific needs of current and future students to be served by the grant. Future recruitment, as well as the allocation of resources to more efficiently and effectively address the needs of FG college students at the point-of-entry, could also be enhanced because of this study.

Methodology

The study utilized a grounded theory methodology which was initially described in the seminal work entitled *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. In 1978, Glaser further developed the grounded theory research design, and additionally remodeled the theory in 1992 to emphasize the difference initially argued for the Grounded-Theory method in 1967. The grounded theory is the logical method for predicting, forecasting and obtaining a specific conclusion or behavior, and is often the research methodology used to examine the social sciences (Glaser & Strauss, 2008).

The primary investigator perused themes that materialized during individual interview sessions of which the [ten] FG college students self-reported by answering a

series of questions. The interview questions were comprised by the primary investigator and are within the context of the purpose of the federally-funded grant program as stated by the TRIO website and the Department of Education (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018).

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1) What needs and aspirations became apparent from the individual interview sessions conducted with the TRIO SSS first-generation participants?

2) What are the emerging themes?

3) What, if any, is the relationship between the purpose of the TRIO SSS program objectives and the themes that manifested?

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Understanding the needs and aspirations of FG college students continues to be a relevant issue and topic of discussion amongst administrators, instructors, and policy-makers on a global level. The United Nation's Task Force on the Post-2015 report regarding education and skills argued that education policies and programs must be built based on a careful analysis of individual needs and aspirations of the enterprises and societies in question (Report of the UN System's Task Team, n.d.). While there is liberal research on underrepresented students, to include students enrolled in TRIO programs, the shortage of knowledge regarding the student's aspirations is what this study aimed to address.

The study focused on understanding individual students, specifically first-generation college students, based on what they envision for their future, what characteristics they exhibit, their socioeconomic background, family demographics, personal motivation, and the eligibility criteria met for enrollment in the federally-funded TRIO SSS program. This information was sourced from self-reported data gathered upon the initial application for the TRIO SSS program. The study was intended to be empowering in that it focused on *whom* the FG college student is (autonomy), as opposed to *what* the FG college student is (disadvantaged).

Definition of Key Terms

The study exerted terms commonly used throughout the TRIO community and programs that provide support to underrepresented student populations. The following definitions are provided to offer clarity and a broader understanding of the terms used throughout the study:

Adult-learner. A mature student or returning student who is involved in forms of learning such as the pursuit of completion of an undergraduate level degree. This term is used interchangeably when referring to the non-traditional student (USDE, 2018).

Achievement. The process or fact of achieving something (Merriam-Webster, 2017). For this study, the term "achievement" refers to the process of completing a college degree, certification or diploma.

Aspiration. a) a hope or ambition of achieving something. b) a goal or objective that is strongly desired as defined by Merriam-Webster (2017).

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College-success. The primary investigator defines college-success as a student's

continued good academic standing (cumulative grade point average of 2.0 or better)

and good financial standing at their enrolled college and successful completion of their

desired postsecondary credential (certificate, diploma, and degree).

College-success program. A program within the college system with the goal of

supporting students' postsecondary degree attainment. The TRIO Student Support

Services program is a highly-recognized college-success program across America (USDE,

2018).

First-generation. A first-generation (FG) college student is one who was raised in

a home where the parent with whom they resided did not obtain a baccalaureate

degree from a four-year college or university (USDE, 2018).

Low-income. An individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year

did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount as established by the federal

government (USDE, 2018).

Need. Something that is essential or required (Merriam-Webster, 2017). As it

relates to education, a *need* is viewed as a necessity or obligation. Webster references

need as "a wish for something lacking or desired." Many view education as a

requirement to successfully gain employment and advance in their careers.

Non-traditional student. One who has delayed enrollment into postsecondary

education and often refers to students over the age of 25 pursuing an undergraduate

level degree. Non-traditional students are nowadays referred to as *adult-learners* because of the multifaceted characteristics of this population of students (USDE, 2018).

Persistence and Retention. Persistence and retention are used interchangeably to describe the continual pursuit of a student in a degree program leading towards the completion of a college degree in the student's desired field of study (USDE, 2018).

Postsecondary attainment. Postsecondary attainment or PSA is the completion of a college degree (associate or higher) as well as transfer from a community college on to a four-year college to obtain a bachelor's degree (USDE, 2018).

Postsecondary enrollment. Postsecondary enrollment or PSE is the successful enrollment of a student at any postsecondary institution (USDE, 2018).

Student perception/perspective. A [student's] way of regarding, understanding or interpreting something; a mental impression. A [student's] point of view (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

Traditional student. One who enrolls in undergraduate studies at a college or university immediately after graduation from high school (USDE, 2018).

TRIO. Consists of eight federally-funded programs developed to serve students who identify as low-income (LI), first-generation (FG), and students with documented disabilities (D) to facilitate and support achievement of postsecondary education goals. The name TRIO originated with three veteran programs nationally known as Upward Bound (UB), Educational Talent Search (ETS) and Student Support Services (SSS) (USDE, 2018).

TRIO Student Support Services. Student Support Services or SSS is a federally-funded program which provides students who have been enrolled at the college with wrap-around services to support student success with a primary focus on services to increase retention and PSA (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018). An objective of the SSS grant hosted at the community college in rural Kentucky is the successful completion of a certificate, diploma or two-year degree and transfer on to a four-year institute of higher learning (Community College, 2014).

Underrepresented or disadvantaged student. A disadvantaged or underrepresented student is a student whose socio-economic status identifies them as low-income (LI) and whose circumstances potentially hinder or serve as a barrier to learning, such as first-generation (FG). Examples of barriers to learning are lack of economic, academic, social, and family support. Students who identify as LIFG have lower odds of completing postsecondary education (USDE, 2018).

Summary

This study addressed concerns from the TRIO student's perspective at the point-of-entry into the community college and enrollment into the TRIO SSS program regarding their future at the college and successful completion of their desired certification, diploma, or degree. For nearly fifty years the federally-funded TRIO SSS programs have existed as a support for underrepresented students in the U.S. who seek to achieve higher education, because of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018). TRIO programs continue to evolve with precise purpose, set expectations,

specific goals and objectives to enroll and serve participants enrolled in the college-success programs. Most literature regarding students served under the umbrella of the TRIO programs has well-addressed *what* these students are (i.e., low-income, first-generation, and documented disability) (Lee, 2017; Mortenson, 2011; USDE, 2018), however, there remains a dearth in literature as to *who* these students are from the student's perspective regarding their needs and aspirations. That personal perspective is crucial for their success in academia.

The current study evaluated the student's aspirations and anticipated needs at the start-of-enrollment into the TRIO SSS program and overall college experience, and the relationship between their perspective and the purpose of the program as stated in U.S. legislation. Chapter 2 reviews four components related to the TRIO SSS program and the aspirations of the first-generation college students enrolled, as it relates to their future. Chapter 3 presents the grounded theory research methodology that was employed, the rationale for utilizing this method, its appropriateness for the study, description of the collection data, selection of participants, and the data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the research findings. Chapter 5 includes how the findings address the gap in the stated rationale for the research, articulates the limitations of the study, and presents an analysis of themes and links the analysis back to the literature. The identification of areas for further research that emanate from the study concludes Chapter 5. The proceeding chapter will provide a review related to the four constituent parts of literature as aforementioned.

II. Literature Review

This chapter gives an overview of the four areas of literature reviewed for this study that pertain to the aspirations of the TRIO SSS FG college student, and the relationship between their aspirations and the purposes of the TRIO SSS program as stated in U.S. regulation and legislation. Following the overview of these four fields of literature is a statement regarding the dearth of the literature which the study will address. The conceptual framework for addressing the identified lack of knowledge on which the study focuses is also described.

Fields of Literature

Four fields of literature established this study. The first field of literature reviewed for this study was the U.S. legislation which articulates the purpose of the TRIO SSS program and governs program implementation. The second field reviewed was the discourse on FG college students, of whom the participants in the TRIO SSS programs constitute a subset. The third component of literature was the historical barriers to the persistence and retention rate of FG college students, and the fourth component of literature consisted of the self-reported needs and aspirations of the FG college student.

TRIO SSS Programs: The Purpose (Federal Law)

TRIO SSS is more than a college-success program. It is a support system to aid students in succeeding in college through services that target PSE and PSA. Table 1 shows that in the 2013-2014 academic year, per the latest U.S. Department of

Education's *Fast Facts Report*, more than 80% of the 101,065 participants enrolled in the

TRIO SSS program at two-year colleges identified as first-generation (USDE, 2018). These

results were based on the grantees that submitted an Annual Performance Report (APR)

in the academic year 2013-2014 for the latest grant cycle (period 2009-2010 through

2013-2014) (USDE, 2018).

Table 1. FG Participants Served by TRIO SSS at Two-Year Institutions (2013-2014)

Participant characteristics	Number of Participants	Percentage
Eligibility status:		
Low-income and first-generation	69,271	68.5
Low-income only	6,832	6.8
First-generation only	14,107	14.0
Disabled	4,141	4.1
Disabled and low-income	6,714	6.6
Total	101,065	100

Note. Adapted from the Federal TRIO Programs-Homepage, U.S. Department of
Education, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/trio50anniv-factsheet.pdf
and compiled by the author. FG = first-generation.

The importance of recognizing the TRIO SSS program's full panoply of services is

evident. College-access alone is not sufficient and posits the importance of services to

support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as first-generation college

students, in being successful in postsecondary studies as argued by Engstrom et al.

(2008). Although Engstrom and Tinto did not specifically name the TRIO SSS program,

reference was made to the kind of services that the TRIO SSS program provides

throughout the postsecondary journey. For example:

> Access without support is not opportunity. That institutions of higher learning do not exclude students from college does not mean that they include them as fully valued members of the institution and provide them with the support to enable them to translate access into actual success. More often than not, our conversations about access ignore the fact that without support many students, especially first-generation students who are underprepared, are unlikely to succeed. (p. 50),

The Evolution of Educational Opportunity Programs

The following section reviews the evolution of the TRIO SSS program, focusing on

the program's history and specifically looking at the legislation that established the

program in 1968. The review of the evolution of the federally-funded TRIO programs

was divided into the periods 1968 – 2002 and 2003 – 2014. Since one set of data for

which this study was generated falls between the years 2003 through 2011, the division

of the review of the TRIO SSS program's evolution into two periods allowed for one such

period to correspond with this specific set of data.

Evolution of TRIO Student Support Services program. The history of TRIO

programs is progressive, according to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2018).

TRIO originated with the Upward Bound (UB) program, which emerged out of the

Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964. This Act was a response to the

administration's "War on Poverty." The Upward Bound program was followed in 1965

by the Talent Search outreach program (now referred to as Educational Talent Search,

or ETS), which was created to serve students in secondary education as part of the

Higher Education Act, much like the UB program. The Student Support Services program

was created in 1968 which comprised the third, or "TRIO," of supportive programs in

federal higher education policy targeted at supporting underrepresented students.

Mortenson (2011) describes TRIO as such:

> Since 1965 the federal government has developed supportive service programs to address barriers to higher education for students from low-income, and first-generation family backgrounds. These supportive services are referred to as the TRIO programs. Between 1970 and 1973 there were actually three TRIO programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Even after the Educational Opportunity Centers were added in 1974, and the McNair Scholars program were added in 1989, the TRIO moniker stuck. TRIO programs are large in number, however, by standard measure they do not reach more than one student in twenty who would be eligible for the services provided. (p. 1-2),

TRIO has now increased to eight different outreach programs. The original three

outreach programs (UB, ETS, and SSS) are joined by the Upward Bound Math and

Science (UBMS), Veterans Upward Bound (VUB), Ronald E. McNair Scholars, the

Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) programs, and the TRIO training for personnel

serving supportive programs (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018). Every individual TRIO program is

accountable along various measures as set by the guidelines of the grant and governed

by the U.S. Department of Education, which includes:

1. Examples of accountability measures for the TRIO SSS program are noted,

   and as introduced in the Education Amendment of 1980, every TRIO SSS

   program must provide assurances through the APR and assure the Secretary

of the Department of Education of the following (Mortenson, 2011; USDE, 2018):

Not less than two-thirds of the program participants will be

    a. Low-income who are also first-generation college students, or

    b. Individuals with disabilities

2. The remaining program participants will be either low-income individuals, first-generation college students, or individuals with disabilities (USDE, 2018), and

3. No less than one-third of the individuals with disabilities served by the program should also identify as low-income (USDE, 2018)

Every TRIO SSS program must provide data on an annual basis to report on the rate of retention or persistence, financial and economic literacy, the number of participants served from the beginning of one academic year to the next academic year, and the rate of graduation and transfer within four years for two-year colleges (USDE, 2018). The following section reviews the purpose of the TRIO SSS program according to federal law, per the reauthorization of the HEA in 1968. The review is comprised of two timeframes. The first timeframe is 1968 – 2002, and the second is 2003 – 2014. The second timeframe encompasses all the historical data analyzed for the current study.

In 1965, the first of the TRIO programs (UB) was established. However, the actual legislation that led to the creation of TRIO was introduced the year prior (USDE, 2018).

Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964. The opening statement of the EOA includes the "Findings and Declaration of Purpose," which states that every individual in the United States should have the opportunity for higher education, and the opportunity to work and train for jobs that would potentially make provisions for a decent lifestyle. The Office of Economic Opportunity was established because of the EOA of 1964 (GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix A provides additional details related to the EOA of 1964.

Higher Education Act of 1965. The first program to focus on youth was established under the Higher Education Act of 1965. The program was named "Contracts to Encourage Full Utilization of Educational Talent." The HEA of 1965 established the Talent Search program which was the first program to serve students with exceptional financial need (GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix B provides additional details and the seminal clause regarding the establishment of the first educational opportunity program of the HEA act of 1965.

Higher Education Amendment of 1968. Talent Search, Upward Bound, and the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (now Student Support Services) programs were formed under the Higher Education Amendment of 1968. These three programs

were informally known as "TRIO" and served students in secondary and postsecondary education. It is also under this legislation that the UB program was reassigned from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Commission of Education (GovTrack.us, 2018). Additional details related to this amendment are offered in Appendix C.

Higher Education Amendment of 1972. The fourth program, Educational Opportunity Center was established under the Education Amendment of 1972 to serve adults from low-income families with academic potential, but lack of college-preparedness with enrollment into postsecondary institutes (GovTrack.us, 2018). Additional details on this legislation can be found in Appendix D.

Higher Education Amendment of 1976. The fifth educational opportunity program was developed under the umbrella of the Education Amendment of 1976. This program was established to train staff working with the programs, rather than to serve targeted students enrolled in programs to improve delivery of services provided to students in college access and success programs (GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix E offers additional details on this legislation.

Higher Education Amendment of 1980. The Education Amendment of 1980 introduced the terms "low-income" and "first-generation college student," and established assurances by the grantees for participants of the programs. This amendment permitted for services to be offered to students with limited English proficiency, while also specifying the age ranges for participants of ETS, UB, and EOC programs (GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix F offers additional details on this legislation.

Higher Education Amendment of 1986. The Higher Education Amendment of

1986 expounded on the definition of first-generation college student which addressed

children of single-parent households. These amendments also established a sixth

program — the Post-Baccalaureate Achievement program — which served students

through completion of a doctoral degree. The HEA of 1986 also renamed the *Special*

Services college-success to the *Student Support Services* (SSS) and identified assurances

of the program (GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix G offers additional details on this

legislation.

Higher Education Amendment of 1992. The Higher Education Amendment of

1992 officially instated the "Federal TRIO programs" nomenclature and decreased the

age for participation in Talent Search from 12 to 11 years of age. It was this amendment

that defined the three purposes of the Student Support Services program 1) to increase

retention and graduation rates, 2) to increase transfer rates to a four-year college from

a two-year college and 3) to foster a program of success for students who identify as

low-income, first-generation and disabled. The HEA of 192 also named the Post-

Baccalaureate Achievement program the "Ronald E. McNair Scholars program"

(GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix H offers additional details on this legislation.

Higher Education Amendment of 1998. The GEAR UP program was established

under the Higher Education Amendment of 1998 as a program to serve cohorts of

students separate from the purpose of TRIO programs, which only focused on serving

students individually (Ed.gov., n.d.; GovTrack.us, 2018). Appendix I offers additional details related to the legislation of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998.

Veteran Programs. In 1990, the Veteran's Upward Bound and the Upward Bound Math and Science programs were established through another legislation, following growing concern for the transition of Vietnam veterans and the many readjustment problems they encountered upon return to the United States. These programs were designed to assist veterans in the development of skills to promote success in postsecondary enrollment and attainment (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018).

2003 – 2013 Span

The preceding section provides the historical timeframe of the evolution of the TRIO programs since their inauguration in 1964 through 2002. The succeeding sections review the evolution of TRIO from 2003 through 2013, which is the legislation upon which the current study is based.

2003 – 2013 period. During this period, the most relevant development was the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which occurred in 2008. This reauthorization was signed by President George W. Bush on August 2, 2008, and is referred to as the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 (GoTrack.us, 2018; USDE, 2018).

Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Additional service requirements of financial and economic literacy for the Upward Bound, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers, and Student Support Services programs, were mandated and

deemed a permissible service for the McNair program. It was during this period that the

federal government emphasized the development of a common "TRIO" terminology

under the umbrella of TRIO programs. (GovTrack.us, 2018; USDE, 2018). Appendix J

offers additional details on this legislation. The second track of literature reviewed for

this study is the discourse on disadvantaged students.

<div align="center">Discourse on Disadvantaged Students</div>

This section separates from the HEA of 1965 the term "disadvantaged students,"

and instead utilizes the most recent terminology used in federal law and literature to

identify the population targeted by TRIO programs. The students served under the

umbrella of TRIO are diverse and identified in various ways — thus defying a single

definition. "Low-income" and "first-generation" are terms most commonly used when

defining TRIO student participants in the Higher Education Amendment of 1980

(definitions are presented in chapter one) and are used often in this study. Other

definitions of low-income and first-generation (LIFG) college students and the barriers

they face to obtain their academic goals successfully are reviewed in the following

section.

<div align="center">*First-Generation in College Literature*</div>

Literature defines "first-generation" in a variety of ways. In the study on first-

generation students enrolled in a community college, Stieha (2010) defines first-

generation college students as someone whose parents did not complete a four-year

degree program. Stieha (2010) argues that students whose parents did not earn a

baccalaureate degree are less likely than their peers, whose parents earned a degree, to be successful in applying for college, financing college, and navigating their way through college towards successful completion.

In 2009, President Barack H. Obama's first speech to a joint session of Congress addressed the policy focus on college completion. His expression was directly associated with literature about access to and success in postsecondary education for first-generation college students. President Obama suggested that it is the responsibility of educators and lawmakers to make the system of higher education work, but it is the responsibility of everyone to participate in making the system work. President Obama suggested every American should commit to at least a year of higher-level learning or career training (2009). He additionally proposed that every American should aspire to achieve more than a high school diploma with a goal of repositioning America to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020.

Additional factors that contribute to underrepresented students. A few studies (Engle et al., 2006; Mortenson, 2011; Shumaker et al., 2016; Stieha, 2010) describe impediments that first-generation college students, as well as students from low socioeconomic status (SES), face. A common theme found in past studies contends that first-generation college students are underprepared for college. Often the lack of preparation of FG college students is a result of having to work during their college experience combined with the lack of support from family members who do not understand the value of a college education.

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Assurances: "What" the first-generation college student is: TRIO SSS programs are required annually to provide assurances regarding first-generation participants of the program, as well as the composition of other students served by the program (i.e., low-income and students with disabilities), all of which are a subset of the broad spectrum of underrepresented students in education. Based on the literature, there remains very little dispute as to *what* a student who identifies as a first-generation (disadvantaged) college student is.

Studies regarding *who* first-generation college students are were addressed early on by many. Previous studies have also placed more focus on the FG college student's perceptions at the end of secondary education before enrolling in college, as well as at the end of participation in a TRIO program (Engle et al., 2006; Redford & Hoyer, 2017). There remains limited insight into the student's perceptions at the point-of-entry of entry of their first year of postsecondary education and the point of entry in their TRIO experience.

An additional limitation, which evinces the need for the current study, is the lack of focus on the past experiences of the FG college student. Various studies have focused on the narrow six-month time frame of the transition from high school to college (Halling, Blount & Blount, 2017; Lile et al., 2017; Royster, Gross & Hochbein, 2015), however, there remains a need to delve into the FG college student's aspirations in the present — at the start of enrollment; the beginning of their college experience. This study has the potential to illuminate how the FG college student's needs and

perspectives could influence the improvement of services provided by the TRIO SSS

program. In secondary education, grade performance constitutes an extrinsic reward,

whereas the student's perception of intellectual growth is the intrinsic reward. Both

concepts are based on the student's desire for his or her development. Mitchell (2014)

argues that this is an aspirational myth whereas students' learning is measured by

guidelines and ideas created by their instructors. It is during secondary education that

students develop the habit of comparing themselves based on how they fall short of

standardized scores and judgments. The section that follows will review the literature

regarding the student's aspirations surveyed by this study.

Barriers to Persistence and Retention

Students who identify as low-income or first-generation (LIFG) are less likely to

enroll in postsecondary education and are less likely to persist through graduation than

their peers whose parents have achieved a four-year degree (Engstrom et al., 2008;

USDE, 2018). In the interest of fulfilling the effort to increase access and of attaining

other educational and practical institutional goals, postsecondary institutions look to

programs like TRIO Student Support Services to assist in improving the persistence and

retention rates of LIFG students. Obstacles often associated with students who identify

as LIFG include lack of financial resources; lack of adequate academic preparation; lack

of family support; lack of knowledge of the campus environment, as well as its academic

expectations, terminology, and bureaucratic operations (Longwell et al., 2016). In

addition, the lack of student engagement activities and the lack of cultural awareness,

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to include the cultural conflict students encounter between home and the college community, also create difficulties related to the transition to college for LIFG students, therefore making them less likely to retain (Acosta, 2017; Engle, et al., 2006; Engstrom et al., 2008; John, Williams & Moronski, 2010; Mortenson, 2011). All of these obstacles serve as traditional barriers for retention and as a result, cause an increase in the attrition of LIFG students at two and four-year institutions alike.

Student Aspirations

Aspirations: "Who" the Student Is

As opposed to focusing on the characteristics the students carry from their past and *how* the students are defined in the education system, the literature regarding student aspirations focuses on *who* the students are and how they envision their futures. Garcia (2015) suggests that student aspirations are not formed by making judgments, nor based on experience, but that they are taught through socialization. The stance of the researcher is that student aspirations are a combination of hopes, dreams, beliefs, and values which are sustainable despite overwhelming conditions.

There is a deficit in research regarding student needs and aspirations at the start of postsecondary enrollment. Studies reviewed made a note of the scarcity of research that addresses the importance of the direct view students' face at the onset of enrollment into college as well as the TRIO SSS program, the nature of their aspirations, and their view of what is needed to sustain those aspirations throughout their college

experience to completion. This study utilizes the aspirational myth to survey the goals of PSE and PSA for first-generation college students enrolled in TRIO SSS.

There is limited research that asks students directly about why they choose to attend an institute of higher learning, but there is ample research regarding why students do not retain (Smith & Kennedy, 2010). Attrition is especially applicable to disadvantaged students; such as first-generation college students. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs and aspirations of FG college students at the genesis of community college enrollment and TRIO SSS program enrollment, and to analyze how their needs and aspirations relate to the current objectives of the TRIO SSS program.

By focusing on the aspirations of the FG college student a path of hope is envisioned by building on current actions to achieve future benefits. Appadurai (2004) stated that "aspirations certainly have something to do with wants, preferences, choices, and calculations" (p.67). Aspirations are an important element as it relates to individuals' imagining their futures, rather than as a destination or an end-point (Sellar, Gale & Parker, 2011). Their stance is that:

> Rather than approaching the task of "raising aspiration" from the perspective of higher education as the desired end, this shift in approach would involve creating public spaces of debate about how the imagined world or desired end of different groups can be resourced and realized through higher education (Seller et al., p. 48),

This study, built on the literature reviewed in this chapter, took a look at whether or not students' aspirations emerged as a theme upon entry into their TRIO SSS program experience, and the analysis included consideration of themes that emerged

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which relate to the purposes of the TRIO SSS program. Acosta (2017) suggests that there should be a direct questioning of students about their hopes when transitioning to postsecondary education. This study focused on the gap in knowledge about the FG college students' aspirations at the beginning of their college experience as a TRIO SSS participant to prepare for PSE and PSA.

Addressing the Gap in Knowledge

The study sought to address the limited research regarding the needs and aspirations of FG college students. Specifically addressed was whether the student's self-reported needs and aspirations at their point-of-entry in the college's TRIO SSS program coincided to the services rendered for PSE and PSA. TRIO SSS personnel and policymakers are very knowledgeable about the student population served by the program. However, there remains the potential of better serving FG college students by exploring their aspirations on the cusp of enrollment and how those aspirations relate to the objectives and purpose of TRIO SSS. Smith et al. (2010) suggest that exploration of student aspirations should be directly addressed with the individual student, as their transition from secondary to postsecondary education warrants greater attention. The current study evaluated the needs of the students from a progressive stance and focused on the needs and aspirations of [ten] FG college students as it related to their postsecondary educational experience.

The What and the Who:

Most research concerning disadvantaged students, such as first-generation college students, conveys *how* they are defined, as opposed to *who* they are. The U.S. Department of Education requires this assurance (COE, n.d.; TRIO 2018) for annual reporting, which reports on the characteristics of the student and does not seek to understand the student's perspective (USDE, 2018). The lack in perspective seems short-sighted, as better knowledge could potentially provide useful insight as to how to better serve the FG college student.

Garcia (2015) suggests that FG college students often express aspirations as a desire or a hope. The acute difference between aspiration and hope is that hope is an expectation or a feeling, whereas aspirations are a desired goal or achievement. Aspirations are not formed through past experiences or by making judgments; instead, they are acquired through socialization. Thus the discourse on disadvantaged students, of which FG college student constitutes a subset, places more focus on *what* the students are (i.e., first-generation or low-income,) and which characteristics they carry from their past, in contrast to focusing on *who* the students are and how they envision their futures. By broadening the perspective, suggestions could be made in program recruitment, program facilitation, and activities to help with retention. This study intended to illuminate the direct statements from the ten FG college students as an unexploited resource that could overall benefit the TRIO SSS program.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this interpretive study comprised of both the legal angle of the U.S. Department of Education which governs the TRIO SSS program and the FG college student aspiration angle. The independent variable in this study is the legal angle or TRIO regulations. Through the legislative angle, the researcher focused on the macro level of policy and federal law related to the purpose of the TRIO SSS program. The intervening variable in this study is the angle of the FG college student. Through the FG college student aspiration angle, the researcher focused at the micro level, more precisely the articulated needs and aspirations of the FG college student at the point-of-entry into the TRIO SSS program. The study's focus on the legal angle and the student aspiration angle abjure employing the frame of discourse on disadvantaged students.

As aforementioned, research regarding the discourse of underrepresented students, such as FG college students, is abundant; a direct inquiry into what the student aspires upon enrollment into postsecondary education and TRIO supportive services, however, is lacking. The stance of the researcher was that a factor which could potentially aid in closing the gap on the PSE and PSA of FG college students is the insight into the student's aspirations at the embarkment of their academic journey and enrollment in the TRIO SSS program. This study contributes a thread to the strand of inquiry focusing on the gap in knowledge to prepare FG college students for PSE and

PSA; identified as the dependent variable in this study. Figure 2-1 illustrates the

conceptual framework for this study.

TRIO SSS purpose per legislation: Persistence & Retention Supportive Services & Resources Financial & Economic Literacy Graduation & Transfer	Point-of-enrollment: *What?* Assurances… FG college student enrolled in the TRIO SSS program	End Point: Postsecondary Enrollment (PSE) Postsecondary Attainment (PSA)
	Point-of-enrollment: *Who?* Aspirations… Goals, hopes, challenges, fears, needs, triumphs	
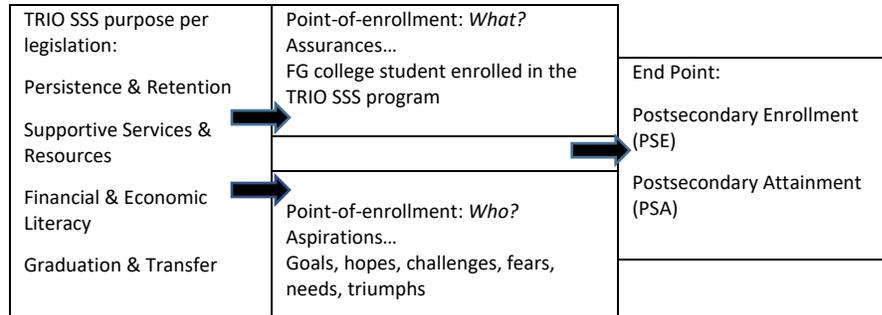
Figure 2-1. Conceptual Framework
The point-of-entry: Student's aspirations upon enrollment in the TRIO SSS program.
TRIO SSS = one of the original "three" U.S. government outreach programs established
to support underrepresented students in higher learning; SSS = Student Support
Services; first-generation college student = a person who resided with parents of which
neither have completed a baccalaureate degree. Figure compiled by the primary
investigator.

Summary of Literature Review

The review of the four components of literature which established this study and

the aspirations of first-generation (disadvantaged) college students revealed the dearth

of knowledge to be addressed in this study. The shortage of research regarding the

needs and aspirations of first-generation college students is the gap addressed in this

study. This research is gathered at the point-of-entry of the [ten] FG college student's

participation in the TRIO SSS college-success program. This study was conducted using a

conceptual framework comprised from the literature regarding the TRIO SSS program,

the objectives of the program, historical barriers that hinder persistence and retention,

the needs and aspirations of its first-generation participants, and how the set objectives

of the SSS program directly aligned with the student's self-reported needs and aspirations.

Since there are various definitions of who a first-generation college student is, it is incumbent upon researchers, administrators, policy-makers, and students themselves to understand the precise meaning that is being utilized for a program of support services or research conducted. For example, if a student's parent earned an Associate's degree, the student is not considered to be first-generation under the standards articulated by Engle et al. (2006). A student who identifies as such could believe that because one or both of their parents have achieved a two-year degree, they do not meet the criteria of first-generation therefore making them ineligible for services rendered by the TRIO SSS program. However, under the guidelines of TRIO, and more specifically the SSS program, the same student is considered to be a first-generation college student since neither parent achieved a four-year degree and therefore making them eligible for TRIO services under the first-generation criterion (COE, n.d.; USDE, 2018).

In the Engle et al. (2006), Mortenson (2011), and Stieha (2010) studies regarding students enrolled in community college, they describe the barriers that low-income and first-generation (LIFG) college students face. The barriers include but are not limited to, lack of resources, support, study skills, and college readiness, and even language barriers such as terminology used on college campuses. Similarly, John et al. (2010) argued that too many students are not college-ready, and often have to work long hours

while they study to support themselves and their families. An explanation of the

grounded theory methodology utilized to conduct this study is provided in Chapter 3.

III. Methodology

First-generation college students aspire for their future; however, many do not have the support to help them successfully achieve their academic goals (Garcia, 2015). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs and aspirations of [ten] TRIO SSS first-generation college students at the beginning of enrollment in postsecondary education and the TRIO SSS college-success program by examining emerging themes from the student's perspective as it relates to their PSE and PSA. This chapter includes information related to the Population and Sample, Instrumentation, and Data Collection. The previous review of legislation and regulations of literature about the students' view provided the framework for this research.

The study attempted to determine if the needs and aspirations of newly enrolled FG college students were aligned with the objectives of the TRIO SSS program and if the themes that emerged during the examination might aid in improving the services rendered by the program in the future. The context of the study was at the regional campus of the community college located in rural Kentucky. The community college offers certifications, diplomas, and associate degree curriculum programs. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), which serves as the governing authority for all the community and technical colleges in the state of Kentucky deemed the current study exempt.

There are reportedly over 103,000 participants enrolled in TRIO SSS programs across the U.S. as reported by the Department of Education (USDE, 2018), and per the

regulations set by the Department of Education, two-thirds of the participants must

meet the criteria of first-generation and low-income. The TRIO SSS program used for this

study was funded to serve 140 students each academic year. Table 2 presents data on

the number of student participants enrolled in the community college's TRIO SSS

program for the academic years 2014 – 2016.

Table 2. TRIO Student Support Services (2014 – 2016)

Academic Year	LI	FG	LIFG	LI&D	Dis.	Participants
2014-2015	7	23	102	7	1	140
2015-2016	4	26	100	8	2	140
2016-2017	5	24	98	11	2	140

Note. LI = low-income only; FG = first-generation only; LIFG = low-income and first-generation; LI&D = low-income and disabled; Dis. = disabled only. Compiled from the rural Kentucky community college's TRIO SSS program Annual Performance Report (APR) submitted as an annual requirement to the U.S. Department of Education.

Data presented in the college's TRIO SSS grant proposal in 2014 to re-fund the

SSS program for the years 2015 – 2020, indicate that two-thirds of the students served

must meet the criteria of first-generation college students (and low-income) for

eligibility of services (Community and Technical College in Rural Kentucky, 2014). Table 3

presents the most recent FG college student population enrolled in the TRIO SSS

program.

Table 3. Enrollment of First-Generation College Students in TRIO SSS

Academic Year	FG	LIFG	Percentage
2014-2015	23	102	89%
2015-2016	26	100	90%
2016-2017	24	98	87%

Note. Compiled from the rural Kentucky community college's TRIO SSS Annual Performance Report (APR) submitted annually to the U.S. Department of Education. FG= First-generation; LIFG = Low-income and first-generation.

An Overview and Perspective of the Methodology

The study utilized a grounded theory methodology which was initially described in the seminal work by Glaser and Strauss entitled *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Glaser and Strauss define grounded theory as, "the discovery of theory from data systemically obtained from social research" (Glaser et al., 2008). The primary aim of their writing was to convey that generating theory should not be an extra chore, but an exciting adventure. Their goal was to stimulate other theorists to codify and issue their method for approaching research.

In 1978, Glaser presented an additional approach to a grounded theory which stated that social research is tightly integrated with the methodology, and the data is systematically obtained from the social analysis, which offers a rigorous and orderly guide to the development of theory during each stage of the study, which essentially says that generating theory and conducting social research are two parts of the same process (Glaser et al., 2008; Howard, 2015). Subsequently, Howard (2015) suggests that the foundational question of grounded theory is to determine what theory emerges

from structured comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork to explain what has

been and is being observed (Howard, 2015). He also made note that the focus of

grounded theory is the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical

content.

Grounded theory was appropriate for the current study. The review of the

literature regarding student aspirations did not precisely reveal research the same as

the current study. The experimental approach and focus on the perspective of the FG

college student at the start-of-enrollment into the TRIO SSS program and the college

presents an opportunity for the administration to gain a better understanding of *who*

first-generation college students genuinely are. The findings from the current study

aimed at generating new knowledge of the FG college student which could potentially

inform the TRIO SSS program practices at this particular community college, as well as

other institutions that sponsor federally-funded programs.

Research Design

The study exerted the emergent design of grounded theory and adduced the

seminal works of Glaser and Strauss in 1967, as well as the subsequent writings of

Glaser in 1978 and 1992 (Glaser et al., 2008), and other descriptions and experiences of

scholars who utilized the grounded theory design (Borgatti, n.d.; Creswell & Miller,

2000; Howard, 2015). Glaser introduced the form of grounded theory asserting that

good ideas should earn their way into the theory through emergent themes and they

should not be imposed because of learning or because of doctrinarism (Glaser et al.,

2008). The new design of grounded theory methodology refers to its flexibility, its absence of forced categories and its grounding in data. The concept of emergence implies that it is the researcher's task to discover what theory is embedded in the data (Creswell et al., 2000; Glaser et al., 2008).

Research Paradigm

The study situated an interpretive paradigm and employed grounded theory methodology to determine how the student perceived their needs being met and the correlation, if any, as a participant of the TRIO SSS program. The qualitative research in the study was rooted in the statements as self-reported by first-generation college students enrolled in the TRIO SSS program as first-year college students at this particular community college in rural Kentucky. The grounded theory research in the study analyzed data captured from TRIO SSS FG college student's self-reported perspectives on their anticipated needs in the future, their present needs, and their perception of the mantle that PSE and PSA might play towards meeting their articulated needs and achieving their desired aspirations.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What needs and aspirations became apparent from the individual interview sessions conducted with the TRIO SSS first-generation participants?

2. What are the emerging themes?

3. What, if any, is the relationship between the purpose of the TRIO SSS

    program objectives and the themes that manifested?

Rationale for the Design

Grounded theory abetted the researcher in developing a complete

understanding of how the [ten] first-generation college students enrolled in the TRIO

SSS program described their needs and aspirations upon completing their academic

goals in accordance with the objectives of the federally-funded grant program.

Interpreting the student's self-reported data at the point-of-entry into the program and

the college required qualitative research into their verbiage as recorded by the

researcher. Any recordings or written statements constitute the data within which

coding and identification of any themes which emerged are grounded.

Population and Sample

The TRIO SSS program being studied serves 140 students throughout the

academic school year; of the 140 student participants, 67 percent identified as first-

generation (FG), or low-income and first-generation (LIFG). The student population

enrolled at the community college and the TRIO SSS program primarily identified as

white-Caucasian. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews with ten out of the

140 students served by the TRIO SSS program. Demographics of the sample for the

study are included in Chapter 4.

Each summer, the TRIO SSS program in this study conducts a summer bridge

session to allow the SSS student participants the opportunity to jumpstart their

academic journey at the community college. Students who participated in the 2017

summer bridge program and identified as first-generation (regardless of income) was

the population from which the oral and written statements were drawn for analysis.

Students who identified as low-income, but not first-generation were not included in

this study. The study only targeted first-generation college students; meaning neither of

their parents graduated from a four-year college or university.

All TRIO SSS students enrolled for the fall 2017 semester, whom both attended

the 2017 summer bridge program and who self-reported as FG on their SSS application

were invited to participate in the interview session for the research. A random sample

of ten students from this grouping was selected for the study. Written support to

analyze the TRIO SSS data for this study was secured by the researcher from the

president of the community college.

Research Instrument

The study includes data collected from both the student's interview session

and the student's physical files stored in the locked file cabinet of the TRIO Student

Support Services administrative office, located on the regional campus in rural

Kentucky. The instrument used to collect the data in this study consisted of a series of

questions compiled by the researcher to promote continuing dialogue to assess the

student's needs and determine whether the program services offered match the self-

reported needs and aspirations of the student. Once students were identified for

participation in the study, the researcher reviewed each student's physical files to

ensure point-of-entry into the TRIO SSS program and participation in the 2017 summer bridge session. The physical files were used for the sole purpose of confirming that the students are reported as *first-generation* (FG), as the program enrolls students who are *low-income* (LI) and *first-generation* (LIFG), as well as *low-income* (LI) only and *disabled* only (D). The files otherwise remained behind double locked (file cabinet and office) doors per the guidelines of the grant and Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (USDE, 2018).

Data Collection

The instrument used to collect data in this study were statements obtained from ten FG college students enrolled in the TRIO SSS program during individual interview sessions conducted on the regional college campus. The open-ended questions utilized were designed by the primary investigator to assess the [ten] FG college student's needs and aspirations and to determine whether the program services offered match what the students' self-reported as needs and aspirations. The qualitative data collection was drawn from the student's information, which was self-reported as a newly enrolled first-time student and participant of the TRIO SSS program. The focus of the study was first-time enrolled students of the college and the TRIO SSS program who identify as first-generation and were accepted into the TRIO SSS program at the genesis of their college experience.

An invitation to participate in the study was electronically submitted to students who met the criteria of the research and served as a reminder to the student that their

participation in the study was strictly voluntary and confidential and would therefore

not be shared with anyone other than the researcher, nor hinder their future

participation in the TRIO SSS program. The point of the qualitative interview was to

enable the student to tell their own story on their terms (Creswell et al., 2000; Glesne,

2011; Lichtman, 2013; Pulla, 2014). The researcher offered prompts during the session

as a reminder of which topics to cover, which questions to ask and which areas to

probe. The researcher posed open-ended questions such as:

- Why did you want to attend college?
- Do you have concerns or goals for your future?
- If so, what are those concerns or goals, and how do you envision the TRIO SSS program as a tool in achieving your goals or addressing your concerns?

Data Analysis

The works of grounded theorists informed the data analysis for this grounded

theory research study. Scholars (Birks & Mills, 2011; Borgatti, n.d.; Creswell et al., 2000,

Glaser et al., 2008; Howard, 2015) suggest the importance of the words of the

participants and open coding (Birks et al., 2011; Borgatti, n.d.). Glaser (2008) presented

open coding in 1978 and articulated the four rules of first coding as follows:

Rule one: Ask a set of questions about the data which must be kept in mind from the start
Rule two: Analyze the data line by line and continuously code each sentence
Rule three: The analyst must conduct their own coding
Rule four: The analyst should always interrupt coding to memo the idea

Scholars suggest that the most critical variable emerges from the data as a

primary theme in grounded theory and offers guidance about the identification of a core

category that drives the analysis of data (Creswell et al., 2000; Glaser et al., 2008; Howard, 2015). When coding the data, the researcher should look for a core variable and continuously compare concepts and incidents to generate multiple codes, all the while being aware of the one or two core variables, or the *central theme.* By doing this, the researcher will be able to identify students' primary concerns, as well as the behavior patterns and the relevance as reflected in the data (Creswell et al., 2000; Glaser et al., 2008; Howard, 2015). The scientific software programming tool *Atlas Ti* was utilized to conduct the data analysis in this study. This software was chosen because it has the capability of coding and identifying word repetitions to aid in the identification of emerging themes.

Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Pulla (2014), concepts emerge from multiple sources of qualitative data in grounded theory, such as interviews, documents, biographies, observations, photographs, videos, or any combination of these sources. Validation is determined by the triangulation of data gathered on the same topics through interview sessions and individual written statements, as self-reported by the student upon application and entry into the TRIO Student Support Services program.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher served in the role of observer, data collector, and data analyst, designer of the study, interpreter, compiler, reporter and writer of the research results.

Glaser et al., 2008 speaks of the role of the researcher in two parts with regards to generating theory:

    a. Recognizing the human qualities of the researcher, and

    b. Addressing the role of the researcher to remain objective without bias

Specifically, the data is reliant upon the social psychology of the researcher, for example, the skill, fatigue, fluctuating motivation, maturity, interest, and insight into the ideation of the data. Being merely human, these social psychology factors are to be considered when generating theory. Secondly, the objective position of the researcher and the objectivity as a research stance are to be considered in producing the theory.

The curiosity of the researcher conducting this study was both personal and professional and could play a part in informing the theory that emerged. The researcher's experience working with TRIO programs accounts for professional curiosity and personal interest, and stemmed from being a first-generation college student, as well as conversations had about what first-generation (disadvantaged) college student's needs and aspirations are and how they might align with the goals of the TRIO SSS program and desired PSE and PSA.

Therefore, to counter possible bias and reactivity of the researcher, the long-term involvement of the researcher with the TRIO SSS program was leveraged with the self-reported data retrieved from the TRIO SSS program application, and the data obtained from the individual interview session transcripts. Gathering data on the same

topic through a variety of means was a way of validating emerging themes through

triangulation (Borgatti, n.d.; Pulla, 2014). The researcher solicited a transcriptionist with

an unbiased disposition to ensure trustworthiness of the data results and to neutralize

the potentiality of bias from the primary investigator. The ten participants of the study

were also asked to review the summarization of their final transcript for accuracy before

reporting.

<div align="center">Summary of Methodology</div>

Chapter 3 justified the methodology employed by the current study and outlined

the seminal work developed in 1967 of Glaser and Strauss, as well as Glaser's grounded

theory model, redesigned in 1978 and 1992 (Glaser et al., 2008). The review of the

methodology gives an account of how substantive grounded theory of the data

collected is develop through repetitions of data analysis to illuminate the three research

questions the study sought to address. Chapter 4 presents the qualitative findings of

the research.

IV. Research Findings

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the needs and aspirations of FG college students enrolled in the TRIO SSS program at a community college in rural Kentucky through an examination of themes that emerged from students' narratives obtained from their TRIO SSS applications and individual interview sessions. The investigation was conducted within the context of the purpose of the TRIO SSS program as stated in the U.S. legislation. The following research questions guided the study:

1) What needs and aspirations became apparent from the individual interview sessions conducted with the TRIO SSS first-generation participants?

2) What are the emerging themes?

3) What, if any, is the relationship between the purpose of the TRIO SSS program objectives and the themes that manifested?

The researcher employed the grounded theory research methodology in the study. The study followed a pioneering design of grounded theory research as introduced by scholars Glaser and Strass in 1967 (Glaser et al., 2008). The modernization in this study was its focus on the student's perspective at the point-of-entry of their TRIO SSS experience, and the opportunity this focus represents for better understanding *who* FG college students are. The grounded theory research conducted in this study incorporated reviewing data captured from the [ten] TRIO SSS FG college student's narrative from their perspective on their perceived needs, aspirations, and their

perception of the role that PSE and PSA potentially play in achieving their articulated ambitions and meeting their articulated needs.

Various facets were presented in this portion of the study. These facets comprise an analysis of the evolution of the TRIO SSS program from its inception in 1968 and the results of the exploration of a proportional stratified random sample of the [ten] TRIO SSS student participants who identified as first-generation college students; their narratives and the articulation of the substantive grounded theory that emerged from the analysis of the TRIO SSS program evolution, as well as themes that were revealed. Results of the exploration of the [ten] FG college student's perspective are linked to the analysis of the development of the TRIO SSS program.

The qualitative research in this current study was grounded in the written and oral statements from the ten student participants at the start of the shared experience of enrolling in the TRIO SSS program at a community college in rural Kentucky. Descriptive statistics about the FG college students who compromised the proportional stratified random sample analyzed in this study as part of the grounded theory research were presented in Chapter 3. These ten students were a reflection of the rural community and the regional campus of the community college.

Of the ten FG college students used in this study, six of the narratives were retrieved from FG college students, ages 19 – 30 years, at the origin of their participation in the TRIO SSS program. The remaining four were obtained from students, ages 31 – 59 years, at or near the point-of-entry into the TRIO SSS program. Presented in

Table 4 are statistics about the sample population researched for this study. Data

includes the age, gender, ethnicity, and the three eligibility measures for TRIO SSS (first-

generation college, low-income, and documented disability).

Table 4. Demographics of Sample

Demographic	Self-Reported	Total
Age	19 – 30	6
	31 - 59	4
Gender	Male	3
	Female	7
	White	6
	Black	1
Ethnicity	More Than One Race	2
	Hispanic	1
	Native American	0
	First-Generation Only	2
Criterion	First-Generation & Low Income	8

Note. These excerpts are representative statements from the ten FG college student
sample enrolled in the TRIO SSS program. Compiled by the primary investigator.

Findings

The outcomes of the current study are presented in two parts. The first part

includes an analysis of the evolution of the TRIO SSS program. The second part includes

results of the grounded theory research on the ten FG college students and the

categorical grounded theory that emerged from the exploration of the students'

narratives. As discussed in Chapter 3, an essential grounded theory derived from raw

data, which, in this study were the individual written and oral statements. This section

gives a review of the findings from the analysis of the evolution of the TRIO SSS program

since its inception nearly 50 years ago. The evolution and progression were described in

Chapter 2 of this study and excerpts from the HEA of 1968 presented in Appendix C. The

brief review of the history of TRIO SSS, as presented in U.S. legislation and which

constitutes a portion of Chapter 2 of this study, indicates, in the researcher's opinion, that more relevant descriptors might be "expanding" and "enlarging" rather than progressing. This expansion, or enlargement, along five dimensions, are evident over the half-century of the TRIO SSS programs' evolution.

First, TRIO has expounded on the term "disadvantaged students" from just focusing on one's "exceptional financial need" (HEA of 1965). The term "disadvantaged students" now includes physical disability; cultural, financial, and academic need; and limited English proficiency (Appendix B). Second, TRIO has extended the age range of targeted populations. SSS, formerly referred to as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students, serves older students, including veterans, non-traditional students, and students with physical and learning disabilities. In the sample of FG college students analyzed in the current study, six (60%) of the ten TRIO SSS statements were obtained from students who were between the ages of 19 – 30 years. Of the ten TRIO SSS participant statements, four (40%) were obtained from students between the ages of 31 - 59 years.

Third, TRIO SSS programs extended the list of specifically targeted populations to include students with disabilities, first-generation college students, low-income students, veterans, students with limited English proficiency, homeless students, students in foster care, and students from other groups underrepresented in higher education. In the sample of ten FG college students, two (20%) statements were retrieved from students who meet the first-generation (FG) criterion only; eight (80%)

were retrieved from students who meet the first-generation and low-income (LIFG) criterion; none self-reported as having a documented disability.

Fourth, TRIO SSS programs have broadened their focus from college-access and college-success services to a focus on program outcomes and personal accountability. Over time, the focus of the TRIO SSS program has changed to echo the current discourse concerning college completion (PSE) and degree attainment (PSA). The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 (Appendix J), the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, required the provision of economic and financial literacy services to all student participants enrolled in TRIO programs and signaled a shift from access to financial aid, to personal accounts of participants receiving supportive services for managing their finances. The HEOA of 2008 marked an evolution in the arena of program outcomes as well. For example, the HEOA of 2008 introduced the new requirement that TRIO SSS, a program dedicated since 1968 to PSE, report on the PSA of its participants for up to four years after their college graduation from a two-year college.

Students' aspirations for their future are assets that TRIO SSS participants bring with them into the program and that constitute untapped resources that could be leveraged for program refinements and greater student success. The researcher does not speak to the intent of the U.S. Congress in passing legislation to create and to authorize the TRIO SSS program. Instead, the researcher speaks to the findings that emerged from the review of legislation and the exploration of the TRIO SSS FG college

student narratives. As noted in Chapter 2, Engstrom et al., (2008) argue that college-access alone is insufficient and demonstrates the importance of services to support FG students in being successful in postsecondary studies. The findings from this study that pertain to support the FG college students over time and across educational levels reflect the Engstrom et al., (2008) research and its argument for sustained services.

Emergent Themes

The first research question that guided this study asked about the themes related to needs and aspirations that were revealed during the individual interview sessions conducted. Emergent themes presented from the grounded theory research on the ten FG student participants of the SSS program revealed both needs and aspirations that speak to the abstract; such as a dream, and to the concrete; such as a job with benefits. The themes that presented from the analysis of the individual sessions also speaks to two levels—the self and the family. Table 5 presents a summary of the most common themes that emerged from the research.

Table 5. Two Levels of Emergent Themes

Theme	# of SSS FG Students	Percentage
Self: Goal, Dream "My dream is to become a nurse." "This is my dream, and I believe it will come true."	10	100
Family: Honor, Exemplar "I am here in remembrance of my mother." "To be a role model for my children."	8	80
Self: Money "I want to earn a better living." "I want to get a good job with benefits and decent pay."	9	90

Table 5 (continued)

Theme	# of SSS FG Students	Percentage
Family: Money "I want to have more earning power." "Get a degree to provide a better quality of life for my children to give them things that I never had."	6	60
Self: Purpose in Life "Each day that I attend a class, I get closer to achieving my academic goal which brings me a step closer to being whom I want to be, and that gives me a reason to push myself. It gives me a purpose in life."	7	70

Note. These excerpts are representative statements from the ten FG college student sample enrolled in the TRIO SSS program. The researcher selected these examples. FG = First-Generation; SSS = Student Support Services. Compiled by the primary investigator.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of the data analysis section, the grounded theory methodology guides researchers in a continuous search for the "core category" or the "main theme" that emerges. In this study, the main theme that emerged from the grounded theory research was the abstract level of the self's dream or goal. The next most common theme focused on the family at an abstract level of honoring prior generations and providing an example for future generations to follow. The third common theme focused again on the self, and more specifically the concrete financial needs of the individual. The fourth most common theme returned to the family, and in this case, more specifically the concrete financial needs of the family. The fifth theme common amongst the ten students interviewed reflected the deeply personal notions of "purpose in life" and "a reason to belong." In summary, the emergent themes revealed a

pattern across the ten narratives of self-family-self-family-self across abstract and concrete levels. Table 5 illustrates the most indicative examples of these major themes.

The most prominent themes presented in Table 5 were the differences between the younger and older FG college students interviewed for this study. While the younger students' narratives primarily focused on the self (i.e., goals and money), the older students' narratives focused on both the self (i.e., goals) and the family (i.e., honor and money). These differences constitute an essential finding of the study and could inform TRIO SSS programs at policy, program management, and research levels.

The second research question that guided this study asked what, if any, is the relationship between the emerging themes and the purposes of the TRIO SSS program. The goals of seven out of the ten TRIO SSS FG college students that were the focus of this study are presented in a condensed form in the conceptual framework for the current research. The four purposes of TRIO SSS in abbreviated form are, to support the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of disadvantaged students; to increase the transfer rate of TRIO SSS participants from two-year to four-year institutions; to foster a environment at the college that is supportive of first-generation, low-income, and students with documented disabilities; and to increase the economic and financial literacy of TRIO program participants (USDE, 2018). The emergent themes from the narratives that speak to the individual as "self" relates to the purpose of the TRIO SSS program. The themes which speak to "family" do not relate to the purpose of the TRIO SSS program. Rather, these "family" themes extend beyond the purpose of the TRIO SSS

program. The analysis presented in Chapter 5 speaks to the theme regarding the extension of the family.

As stated in Chapter 2, and as referenced in the conceptual framework for this study, TRIO SSS programs are required to provide assurances to the USDE annually (USDE, 2018). One assurance designated to all TRIO programs is that two-thirds of program participants must meet the first-generation college and low-income criteria. The analysis of the ten FG college students studied for this grounded theory research revealed pride in and excitement about being current first-generation college students. Table 6 presents excerpts from the narratives that illustrate the student's disposition about being the first in the family to attend college.

Table 6. Student Narratives Regarding Being a First-Generation College Student

Statements:
"Being the first to attend college in my family is a great accomplishment for my family and me. Both of my parents always pushed me to do m best throughout elementary, middle and high school and I appreciate the push. Going to college is special to me because some people are lucky enough to get to go to go to college or have the money to pay for it. I felt very proud and blessed to be able to be the first in my family to attend college.
"But I feel wonderful about being a first-generation college student. I feel very confident and eager to learn all that I can."
"When I was first asked if I was a first-generation college student, I didn't know what that meant. Once I found out the meaning, I was very pleased to know that I qualify as a first-generation college student. Sometimes I feel like I am too late, or too old to be in college and then that's when I tell myself, "But I am here!"
"Being the first one in my family to attend college allows me to leave a legacy for my children and grandchildren and maybe even inspire by siblings to go back to school so they could earn better wages and have a better life."
"Being the first in my family to go to college there's a lot of expectation placed on me, but the expectations I have for myself far exceed those of my family."
"I am proud to be the first one to go to college in my family. My mom is proud because she wants me to work smarter and not harder and that is what I want to show my future kids as well. My mom didn't feel like she had the support of her family to go to college and wants things to be different for me, so I don't want to let her down."
"To be the first to complete college is a big deal. Graduating can change the cycle of my family working in factories."

Table 6 (continued)

Statements:
"Being a first-generation college student makes me feel proud and gives me purpose."
"Being a first-generation college student is an opportunity I didn't expect to have. My income is so far below the poverty level, and I didn't know there were programs like this to help me or I may have come to college sooner."
"I think being the first in my family to attend college is a big deal. My family is very supportive."

Note. These excerpts are representative statements from the ten FG college student sample enrolled in the TRIO SSS program. The researcher selected these examples.

The third research question that guided the current study examined whether or not there was a relationship between the purposes of the TRIO SSS program objectives and the emergent themes. As described earlier in this chapter, the evolution of TRIO SSS has been one of continuing opportunity and enriching postsecondary education for disadvantaged students. The prominent themes from the analysis of the students' narratives reflect the purposes of the TRIO SSS program, as it has evolved. As the excerpts in Table 7 illustrate, the emergent themes indicate that the FG college students in this study aspire to enroll in higher level learning and to maintain strong grade point averages, that they aspire to earn college degrees, and that the older FG college students aspire to graduate college for a variety of reasons, including wanting career advancement, wanting to travel, wanting to volunteer their services to people who are less fortunate, and to provide the best care possible for their children.

Table 7. Themes from FG Students at the Point-Of-Entry into the TRIO SSS Program

Theme	Illustrations from Individual Applications and Interviews
Self: Goal, Dream	"Once I graduate with my Associate's degree I intend to transfer to a four-year college to get a bachelor's degree in Biology." [M] "My goal is to b successful in my classes and achieve and maintain a GPA of 3.2 or higher." [F]

Table 7 (continued)

Theme	Illustrations from Individual Applications and Interviews
	"My ultimate goal is to have a stable life for my family and me. I want to travel and do mission work around the world." [F]
Family: Exemplar	"I want to honor my family and leave a legacy behind and prove to myself that I can do this." [M]
	"I have older siblings, and I don't want to be like them. I think that if I get a degree and a good stable job I could have a better life than what they are choosing." [F]
	"My mom died a year ago, and she would've been so proud of me for deciding to come to college." [M]
Self: Money	"I knew I wanted to come to college because I learned I could earn more with a college degree." [F]
	"I am in college because I want to have a good job. I don't know what I am majoring in just yet, but I really don't care as long as it helps me to get a good paying job." [M]
	"My job laid me off because the company downsized due to jobs going overseas... I knew I had to find another career because I am tired of working in a factory." [F]
Family: Money	"I want a career and be able to provide for my family. College is the only choice I have. I need a good education to be able to provide for my kids." [F]
	"I need the education to advance on my job." [M]
	"I was laid off, but WIA offered to pay for me to go back to school, so I am taking advantage of the opportunity."[M]
Self: Purpose in Life	"I am so glad to be in TRIO SSS because I need the additional support and help with study skills and math anxiety." [F]
	"I want to feel better about myself. I have been a housewife for ten years. I love my family, but I feel left behind." [F]
	"School is important to me and gives me a sense of belonging." [M]

Note. [F] = Female respondent; [M] = Male respondent. These excerpts are representative statements from the ten FG college student sample enrolled in the TRIO SSS program. The researcher selected these examples.

The grounded theory research conducted in this current study discovered

themes that are a tenant in and that emerged from the narratives of the [ten] FG college

student participants enrolled in the TRIO SSS program at a community college in rural

Kentucky. Grounded in the raw data of these ten students, the substantive grounded theory is stated here. Themes emerged from the ten TRIO SSS FG college student statements which revealed the students' aspirations, needs, challenges, difficulties, hopes, goals, and dreams. The themes that emerged were a reflection of the [ten] FG college student in two ways; the first is as "self" and the second is as part of "family" at the abstract and the concrete level. These emergent themes support the purposes of the TRIO SSS program as the program has evolved. These themes also extended beyond the objectives of the TRIO SSS program in ways that described reality for new TRIO SSS students at the commencement of their TRIO experience, and that could benefit other TRIO SSS participants, as well as other TRIO programs in the U.S.

Various scholars investigated the theme of extending support services beyond PSE or PSA, although their work pertains not specifically to TRIO programs, but to broader populations. These scholars assert that students' aspirations are critical to the anticipated postsecondary degree attainment and other outcomes after that, to include income and potential career opportunities (Landers, 2018; Morey, n.d.; Mortenson, 2011). While Sellar et al. (2011) speak to the significance of aspirations not as an endpoint at PSE or PSA, but, as a guide to the imagined futures that PSE or PSA can help shape. The concept of intrinsic rewards accentuates the individual's desires for their development beyond the extrinsic rewards of high achieving grades and course completion (Shumaker et al., 2016).

Summary

Chapter 4 submitted the findings of the grounded theory research by describing the participants and presenting the conclusions of the study. Chapter 5 comprises an analysis of the results by linking them to the literature, stating limitations to the current research, and readdresses the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. Looking to the future, Chapter 5 includes a statement of implications of the research for various audiences and the articulation of areas for potential research in the future.

V. Conclusion and Future Research

The focus of this chapter is to analyze the findings presented in Chapter 4. First, the significant findings are analyzed and considered in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Next, the gap in the literature that was identified in Chapter 2 is considered anew drawing knowledge from the findings. Thirdly, the limitations of the study are articulated, and finally, the researcher readdresses the conceptual framework, its application in the current research and modifications that could apply to the conceptual framework for future studies.

Since 2015, the primary investigator has served as the director of the TRIO SSS program at a regional campus of the community college in rural Kentucky and has seen the many challenges experienced by students who identify as first-generation, and celebrate each's progress realizing and achieving their desired goals and aspirations. As an adult-learner and first-generation college graduate myself, I experienced first-hand the insurmountable challenges and lack of support many students must overcome to aspire to achieve a college degree. The lack of support includes but is not limited to parents who did not graduate from a four-year college or university, lack of economic or financial resources, and the lack of language reference to successfully navigate through the bureaucracy of the college. Witnessing my current students' challenges and achievements, as well as my personal history established the meaning of this study for me. Next is a statement of the study's implications for various audiences, and finally is

an articulation of potential areas for additional research to which the current study

points.

Implications

The findings from this study carry implications for various audiences. The TRIO

SSS program personnel at the community college in rural Kentucky could benefit from a

broader understanding of the FG college students they serve in the SSS program. TRIO

SSS program personnel at other community colleges and four-year institutions across

Kentucky could also benefit from the findings of this research and could implement, as

appropriate, elements of the research to their program management. For institutions

that sponsor TRIO SSS programs and whose student bodies include students from

disadvantaged backgrounds, the findings of the study offer valuable insight. For

example, institutions enrolling first-generation college students could incorporate the

"first-generation as honor" theme in the facilitation of programs and celebrations.

Knowledge of the themes that emerged from the analysis might promote greater

attention to the power of the students' goals and dreams and more precise alignment

between what students want. Whether it is a job, a degree, a specific program, or

stability for their families, as the findings revealed, and perhaps the commitment of

institutional resources. Understanding the theme of "extending beyond PSE and PSA"

can reinforce institutional awareness of PSE and PSA as the byproduct that students gain

on the way to realizing their envisioned futures.

For the policymakers, there is potential value in considering the findings of the current study. The federal government and advocates of educational opportunities could benefit from the concise review of the nearly 50-year evolution of TRIO SSS programs in U.S. law and from the researcher's analysis of the evolution of the program over its five dimensions of broadening and extending. In the context of the national discourse on disadvantaged students, President Obama's 2020 goal as presented in Chapter 2, conveyed that conversations about college completion of underrepresented students, and deeper understanding of TRIO programs and their impact on our nation are imperative. As discussions continue towards the next re-authorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, might the policymakers consider the aspirations of FG college students at the commencement of their participation in the TRIO SSS program?

For the TRIO community, the findings could be useful in strategizing its PSE and PSA efforts; leveraging the TRIO students' aspirations for the second half of the century of TRIO programming and refining the purpose of TRIO as appropriate. In presenting findings in Chapter 4, three opportunities were identified in which TRIO SSS are not vigorously leveraged with policymakers. The emergent themes from the grounded theory research on the student narratives speak clearly to these three opportunities. First, the theme of "focus on self in the abstract" reflects the opportunity for individual participants enrolled in the TRIO SSS program. In order to fulfill an aspiration or achieve a dream, an individual who identifies as a first-generation college student may indeed need to participate in the TRIO SSS program throughout their college experience and on

into graduate school should they choose to pursue a degree beyond undergraduate studies. Second, the theme of "focus on family in the abstract" underscores the heightened opportunity to connect with family members through the shared experience of participation in the TRIO SSS program. Finally, the theme "extension beyond PSE and PSA" evokes the third opportunity through continuing support over time. Filling articulated needs or achieving stated goals often requires, from the point-of-entry, a continued focus on a future that exceeds beyond PSE or PSA and for which college-success services are essential.

The data analyzed in the current study implies that there is an opportunity for shifting the first-generation college student conversation away from a focus on barriers and obstacles and towards the fulfillment of hopes and dreams. Families of TRIO SSS FG college students can benefit from the findings of this research. The themes of "focus on the self in the abstract" and "focus on family in the abstract" could offer new insight to families regarding their TRIO SSS FG college student's aspirations and the importance of connection to the family during their student's postsecondary experience. Families of FG college students can benefit, however, only if they are apprised of these new insights. Workshops for family members of TRIO SSS FG college students could be sponsored by the TRIO SSS program to share ideas on the importance of family in program participants' lives. Gatherings for parents of young TRIO SSS FG college students and for the children of older TRIO SSS FG college students could be organized to disseminate the

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perspectives of TRIO SSS FG participants and to prompt family conversations about PSE and PSA.

Summary of Findings

With the federal TRIO SSS program approaching the half-century milestone since its inception, this study evaluated what students envisioned at the point of entry into college and their TRIO experience. Through focusing on the point-of-entry of students' enrollment into the TRIO SSS program, the study revealed how the purposes of the program, as stated in U.S. legislation, were and were not related to students' perspectives regarding their future. Four tracks of literature were reviewed in Chapter 2. The first track of literature was the U.S. law that articulates the purposes of TRIO SSS programs and governs program implementation. The next track of literature was the discourse on disadvantaged students, of whom the FG college students in the TRIO SSS program constitute a subset. The third area of research reviewed was the historical barriers to persistence and retention, and the fourth area was the FG college student's aspirations.

The U.S. legislation and the aspirations of FG college students were the two components of literature that grounded this study, and the analysis of findings in this chapter are linked primarily to these two components of literature. The review of findings also addresses one aspect of the discourse on disadvantaged students, which is, first-generation, because of its prominence as a topic that emerged through the research on the TRIO SSS FG participant narratives. The analysis of the significant

findings presented in Chapter 4 uncovered new information about the themes that

emerged from the student narratives, about what themes surfaced regarding FG college

student's needs and aspirations, and about the relationship, if any, between the

emergent themes and the purposes of the TRIO SSS program, as the program has

evolved. The four significant findings are presented with commentary and linkage to the

literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Focus on Self

The most important theme which emerged from the narratives was a focus on

self in the abstract, through the articulation of the individual's aspiration. Over one-half

of the stories shared by the participants of the study identified dreams or goals. More

precisely, of the ten FG college students in the sample, seven (70%) spoke to a specific

goal. These goals ranged from going to college for two years and earning a 3.2 GPA, to

becoming a nurse. Emergent from the data collected and analyzed in the current study

are linkage to other scholars' recommendations for research. Through the self-reported

narratives, an appeal was made to students to avow their needs and aspirations, which

reverberates the call by various scholars (Landers, 2018; Sellar et al., 2011; Smith et al.,

2010) to ask students directly about their intentions and aspirations. In speaking with

students encountered in her research, Acosta (2017) reported the optimism,

hopefulness, and forward-looking goals of disadvantaged students which also surfaced

in the evaluation on the [ten] FG college students for the current study.

Focus on Family

The second most significant theme which emerged from the FG college student narratives was a focus on family in the abstract, through the articulation of the individual's desire to be a role model for their children or other family members, and an acknowledgment of prior and future generations. Nearly 100% of the students interviewed identified family as a reason for their being in college. Of the ten FG college students analyzed, nine referenced a connection to family. Of these nine FG college students, six spoke to the desire to honor the family by serving as a role model or an example by embarking on the college journey that other family members did not attempt. The connection to the family that two narratives referenced was of not wanting to follow the path of their older siblings. There is scant research in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 that relates to the essential theme of being a being a role model.

The U.S. law that governs the TRIO SSS program resonates very little, if at all, with the presenting theme of focus on the family in the abstract. The discovery in the legislation and regulations of the TRIO SSS program is not surprising because the program serves individual students, as opposed to cohorts, or communities of students or families. The U.S. law governing TRIO Student Support Services reviewed in Chapter 2 presented the Higher Education Amendments of 1980 which provided a concrete definition of the first-generation college student and referred to parents. However, the reference to parents was strictly for guidance in facilitating TRIO programs and does not

address the theme of focus on the family in the abstract. Shumaker et al., (2016) discussed the impact of family background on students who identify as first-generation, who unlike students from college-educated families, may not have the same knowledge of how to successfully navigate through postsecondary education. The emanate theme of focus on the family in the abstract speaks to the FG college student's hopes for their families, where the students actively envision positive futures for their families.

First-Generation as Honor

The ten students interviewed expressed enthusiasm about being first-generation college students at present. Of the ten FG college students in the sample, ten (100%) described being a first-generation college student as an honor. Describing the thought of being the first in their family to attend college as "an accomplishment," "awesome," "wonderful," and "cool." Evident in the narratives is a timbre that differs from the timbre of the literature on first-generation college students, where the terminology focuses on barriers, obstacles, and elements that constitute students who are challenged both educationally and economically (Landers 2018). As reviewed in Chapter 2, FG college student status pertains to one of the required assurances that TRIO SSS programs must make annually to the U.S. Department of Education (COE, n.d.; TRIO, 2018).

Beyond PSE and PSA

The themes which emerged from the narratives extend along two axes and beyond the evolution of the purpose of the TRIO SSS program. The first axis extends

from the focus of the TRIO SSS program; the individual student and their association to

the family, both prior and future generations. The second axis extends from the

objectives of the TRIO SSS program; that is, PSE and PSA, and contemplates futures

beyond the PSE and PSA of the student. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 gives very

little insight about TRIO SSS beyond the scope of PSE and PSA in the ways identified

through the analysis of the themes from the students' narratives. That there is little

insight provided in the literature about the TRIO SSS program concerning the scope

beyond PSE and PSA is not a surprise in light of the U.S. legislative purposes of the TRIO

SSS program to promote PSE and PSA as the endpoint. As noted in Chapter 4, scholars

(Landers, 2018; Sellar et al., 2011) speak to the scope of disadvantaged students beyond

PSE and PSA, though their research does not explicitly target any TRIO program

participants.

Addressing the Gap

This study addresses a gap in literature as established in the literature review

found in Chapter 2. The gap reveals the scarcity of research regarding the FG college

student's needs and aspirations for the future, as articulated at the point of enrollment

into college and the TRIO SSS college-success program. The findings from this study

sought to contribute to reducing this gap in research. 100% of the included individuals'

in the study reported specific goals, dreams, or aspirations at the beginning of their

participation in the TRIO SSS program and the need for support services for PSE or PSA.

A better understanding of these perspectives could highlight new areas of service for

the federally-funded TRIO SSS program. The extension beyond the PSE and PSA theme described PSE and PSA by identifying the students' aspirations for undergraduate and graduate degrees, long-term family goals, and future career opportunities. This finding also offers insight into why FG college students identified particular goals and into how they articulated contingency plans for instances where they envisioned that a particular goal might not be met. As TRIO SSS has evolved over the past 50 years, so too will they continue to develop and could incorporate extensive services apart from PSE or PSA.

The findings from this study revealed "first-generation as honor" and contributes to our understanding of the student's thoughts within the context of the established literature regarding access to and success while enrolled in postsecondary education. Rather than relegating the FG college student status to a barrier or obstacle, the analysis of the narratives concedes that students draw strength from and take pride in the opportunity to be the first in their family to pursue higher learning. Rather than placing the focus on the needs of the students, the analysis of the narratives presented students' perspectives on being FG college students as an asset that motivated them for success. The difference in tone between the self-reported findings and the established literature was compelling, whereas the former reflects enthusiasm in moving towards envisioned futures, and the latter accentuates the challenges of the past and present.

Discussion

First, themes emerged from the narratives that spoke to students' needs and aspirations and the purpose of the TRIO SSS program. Second, the conceptual

framework provided a way to envisage an extended endpoint beyond PSE and PSA, and

it accommodated the theme that derived from students' narratives about their futures

beyond their articulated goal to attain a college degree. Thirdly, the inclusion of the

assurances component in the conceptual framework; students as *what* was apt and

facilitated the important theme of "first-generation as honor" to emerge. The fourth

emphasis on aspirations in the conceptual framework; students as *who* was apt and

added insight into their hopes, dreams, and contemplated futures for their own lives

and their families' lives as well. Through the exploration of articulated needs and desires

at the point-of-entry, themes were revealed that contributes new comprehension that

might be applied both in research of PSE and PSA programs and in practices associated

with the management of program services that target college-access and college-

success.

The desired result for this study was to shine a light on what, if anything, FG

college students stated about their needs and aspirations. Such awareness could well

inform TRIO SSS programs in the future development of program objectives. The

findings of the study reason for the possibility of considering students' perspectives first,

or, at a minimum, in tandem with the purposes of the TRIO SSS program. How do

students' perspectives inform the purpose of the TRIO SSS program? How might their

perspectives inform those purposes in the future? A guiding question for this study was

whether or not the themes emerging from the FG college student narratives support the

mission of the TRIO SSS program, as the program has evolved. As mentioned in Chapter

4 and as restated in preceding sections, the themes both support the purpose of the TRIO SSS program and extend beyond the purpose of the program as well.

Limitations

While deepening our understanding of the goals of first-generation college students, three primary limitations were revealed from the research. The first limitation was the lack of consistency in the TRIO SSS staff's communication with the students to share their perspectives on the program application upon applying to the TRO SSS program. The limitation exists because there were four different individuals recruiting students for program enrollment. An additional factor was that the application was often shared with potential students in a variety of settings such as, in the classroom, to groups of students during college events or fairs, electronically, or individually. The oral or written invitation for potential students to complete the program application lacks uniformity and consistency when asking the student to write their perspective on applying to college and the TRIO SSS program.

The second limitation was the sample of narratives that were self-reported on a voluntary basis, as described in Chapter 3 of this study. The third limitation was the study's focus on only one TRIO program—Student Support Services. A complete study would focus on all TRIO programs that serve underrepresented students to include Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, Veterans Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math and Science, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program (USDE, 2018). The third limitation established the potential for further research.

The study only targeted students who identified as first-generation college students and did not seek to explore the needs and aspirations of students enrolled in the SSS program who reported as low-income only or having a documented disability only. Random sampling was also limited to the TRIO SSS FG students enrolled in the program located at the regional campus of the community college and did not seek to explore the self-reported needs and aspirations of students enrolled in the TRIO SSS program located on the main campus of the community college located in a metropolitan area of Kentucky.

Recommendations

The current study has great potential for future research in the field of TRIO. A new study could be conducted to probe more deeply the differences between traditional and non-traditional students; which reflects a key finding in the context of the present study. The study could be duplicated at other two-year institutions as well as at four-year institutions, with other TRIO programs. The study could also be duplicated at other institutions that sponsor multiple TRIO programs and, in so doing, contemplate the effects of multiple TRIO programs on the rate of PSE and PSA.

Readdressing the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 introduced the concept of point-of-entry and the student's perspective on the future as articulated upon

application to the TRIO SSS program services for PSA as a central tool in the analysis and

was appropriate for the research in four ways and described in the succeeding section.

Beyond the examination of how students' needs and aspirations relate to and support

the purposes of the TRIO SSS program, the student narratives and the emergent themes

uncovered a different question: How does the purpose of the TRIO SSS program relate

to and support the needs and aspirations of FG college students? Could the needs and

aspirations be important to consider in the articulation of the purpose of the TRIO SSS

program? Figure 5-1 presents the conceptual framework anew for future

recommendations, with an added directional arrow to illustrate the question just

presented, which is, the idea of students' aspirations as an element informing the

purpose of the TRIO SSS program.
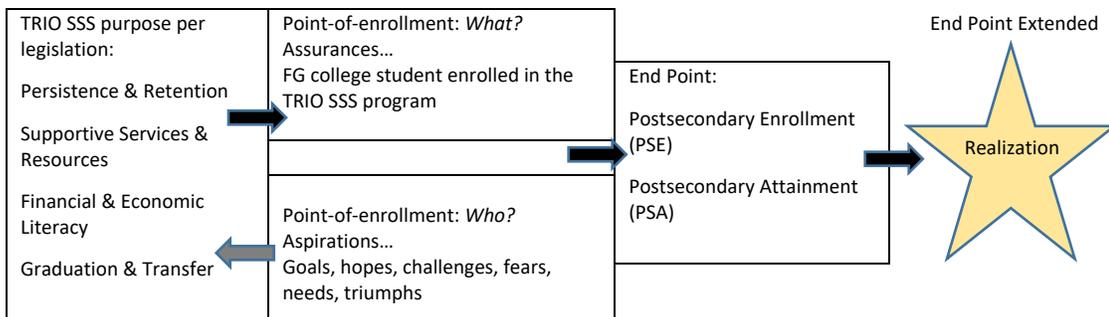
Figure 5-1. Conceptual Framework Readdressed
The conceptual framework, readdressed, at the point-of-enrollment: Students'
aspirations at entry into the TRIO SSS program. SSS = Student Support Services. Figure
compiled by the primary investigator.

Application of the conceptual framework in the future would constitute design of a

longitudinal study to follow students to determine whether or not the aspirations they

articulated at the start of their TRIO SSS experience were realized. The conceptual

framework could be modified to accommodate such a study.

Findings from the data on which this study was based point to areas for potential future research. The first area with potential to be studied in various ways is whether or not the FG college student realizes their needs and aspirations. This area could be examined by conducting qualitative studies, surveys, and interviews. The second area for future research is the differences, if any, in the themes that emerge when the narratives are written voluntarily and when they are written as a program requirement at the onset. The third expanse for future research builds on the finding of differences between younger (traditional) and older (non-traditional) FG college students and could probe into such differences more deeply.

The current study could be replicated at four-year institutions beyond the community college experience. The study could be reproduced with TRIO programs other than TRIO SSS. Plans could be articulated at institutions were similar data does not exist and at institutions where similar data does not currently exist, plans could be articulated for accumulating such data and for conducting studies in the future. An understanding of students' perspectives over time in such an intensive program could provide valuable insight into developing future objectives. This study could also be replicated with other, non-TRIO programs, such as GEAR UP, that also targets FG college students and others from disadvantaged backgrounds. One additional area identified for future research stemming from the current study pertains to a global conversation on college-access and college-success. Continued exploration of PSE and PSA programs

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across continents; their histories, their successes, their current vibrancy, and the

aspirations of students participating in college-success programs could contribute to the

universal body of knowledge, to global policy deliberations, and collaborations across

the globe.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

For nearly 50 years and in accord with the U.S. legislation, TRIO SSS programs

have offered services to aid in PSE and PSA to students who are first-generation college,

low-income, or with documented disabilities (COE, n.d.). Since 1968, TRIO SSS programs

have evolved through broadening and deepening their services to support

disadvantaged students with PSE and PSA. This study investigated what students

envision for their futures at the start of enrollment in college and of their TRIO SSS

experience and how the students' perspective supports the purposes of the TRIO SSS

program. A review of the literature referenced in Chapter 2 revealed scarcity in

knowledge about the students' perspective, and it is this gap in the literature that the

current study addressed.

There were four major themes which emerged from the analysis of the student's

narratives at the commencement of their entry into the TRIO SSS program. As discussed

in Chapter 4, the essential theme which emerged was the *focus on self in the abstract*

through the articulation of the student's needs and aspirations. The next important

theme that emerged *focused on the family in the abstract* through the articulation of

the student's desire to be a role model for their family and a positive influence on future

generations. The third emerging theme was a *first-generation college student as an honor*; describing being the first to attend college as a great accomplishment, and the final pertinent theme that emerged was the potential future of the FG college student that *extends beyond postsecondary enrollment and postsecondary attainment*; envisioning their future after they graduate college and potential opportunities.

Over one-half of the ten FG college students in this research identified specific goals for their futures and focused on their families as a primary motivator for studying in college and for enrolling in TRIO. Researchers suggest that underrepresented students such as first-generation often have the emotional support of their families, along with a strong desire to achieve a degree for potential earnings and career opportunities, with the ultimate goal to improve their socioeconomic status (Acosta, 2017; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). 100% of the students interviewed for this study expressed enthusiasm about being first-generation college students. Students' sentiments indicate that there is an opportunity for shifting the first-generation college conversation away from a focus on the historical barriers and obstacles towards the fulfillment of dreams in the future. The analysis of the student narratives discovered student perspectives that incorporate needs, desires, and goals extend far beyond the PSE and PSA purposes of the TRIO SSS program, as stated in the U.S. legislation (COE, n.d.).

There are implications of the study relevant to various audiences. These audiences include the TRIO SSS staff members at the community college and at other TRIO programs across America; practitioners working with GEAR UP and other initiatives

serving FG college students; institutions that sponsor TRIO programs; the policy community; educators; the TRIO community comprising TRIO program personnel, researchers, TRIO alumni, advocacy groups promoting TRIO; TRIO students themselves; and family members of TRIO students. Delving more deeply into the finding of students' enthusiasm about being a first-generation college student could be vital research to conduct. Additionally, conversations on a global level about the importance of being knowledgeable of student aspirations at the onset, as it relates to college-access and college-success could contribute essential insight to enhance potential collaboration in educational research across continents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Economic Opportunity Act of 1964

Appendix A: Economic Opportunity Act of 1964

Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Public Law 88-452-Aug 20, 1964

Purpose:
The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) (Public Law 88-452) [78 STAT] was the centerpiece of the "War on Poverty," which in turn was a major thrust of the "Great Society" legislative agenda of the Lyndon Johnson administration. The EOA provided for job training, adult education, and loans to small businesses to attack the roots of unemployment and poverty. Originally coordinated by the Office of Economic Opportunity, many sections of the EOA were rescinded. However, other essential segments were transferred within the federal government.
The EOA established over a thousand of Community Action Agencies (CAA's) at the local level to implement Great Society programs.
The EOA required the poor to have "maximum feasible participation" in poverty program planning (EOA, n.d.).

Appendix B: Higher Education Act of 1965

Appendix B: Higher Education Act of 1965 Citation

Higher Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-329, §408, 79 Stat. 1219 (1965)

Purpose:
The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) was legislation signed into United States law on November 8, 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society domestic agenda.

(d) Student Support Services - paragraph (6) of section 402D(c) (20 U.S.C. 1070a-14(c) (6)) is amended to read as follows:

> (6) consider, in addition to such other criteria as the Secretary may prescribe, the institution's effort, and where applicable to history, in--
>
> > (A) providing sufficient financial assistance to meet the full financial need of each student in the project; and
> >
> > (B) maintaining the loan burden of each such student at a manageable level.

Established the first program to serve students with exceptional financial need. The program named *Talent Search* in 1968 re-authorization.

Note: Italicized font highlights program names.

Appendix C: Higher Education Amendment of 1968

Appendix C: Higher Education Amendment of 1968

Higher Education Amendments of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-575, §105, 82 Stat. 1014 (1968)

Purpose:
In 1968, Student Support Services, which was initially known as Special Services for Disadvantaged Students, was authorized by the Higher Education Amendment of 1968 and became the third college access program in the series of federally-funded educational opportunity programs. By the late 1960's, the term "TRIO" was coined to describe these federal programs.

Over the years, the TRIO programs have broadened and improved to provide a broader range of services and to reach more students who need assistance.

Names three programs. "*Talent Search*" term surfaces for the first time "*Upward Bound*" term surfaces for the first time. Adds "*Special Services for Disadvantaged Students*" as the third program. Congress transferred *Upward Bound*, established and developed by the Office of Economic Opportunity, and to the Commissioner of Education. "TRIO" term surfaces in the community of education practitioners to identify the college access and college success programs.

Note: Italicized font highlights program names.

Appendix D: Higher Education Amendment of 1972

Appendix D: Higher Education Amendment of 1972

Education Amendments of 1972, Pub. L. No. 92-318, §417b, 86 Stat. 235 (1972)

Purpose:
On June 23, 1972, the President signed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. Â§1681 <u>et seq.</u>, into law. Title IX is a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in any federally funded education program or activity. The principal objective of Title IX is to avoid the use of federal money to support sex discrimination in education programs and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices. Title IX applies, with a few specific exceptions, to all aspects of federally funded education programs or activities. In addition to traditional educational institutions such as colleges, universities, and elementary and secondary schools, Title IX also applies to any education or training program operated by a recipient of federal financial assistance. The Department of Education has issued regulations on the requirements of Title IX, 34 C.F.R. § 106.1<u>et seq</u>. The Title IX common rule published on August 30, 2000, covers education program providers/recipients that are funded by other federal agencies.

The 1972 amendments to the Higher Education Act created *Educational Opportunity Centers* (EOCs) to help adults select a postsecondary education program and obtain financial aid. *Veterans Upward Bound* (VUB) was also initiated in 1972 as part of the Upward Bound program to serve returning Vietnam veterans.

Educational Opportunity Centers added as the fourth program "TRIO" term for three programs out of date before it is even commonly used.

Note: Italicized font highlights program names.

Appendix E: Higher Education Amendment of 1976

Appendix E: Higher Education Amendment of 1976

Education Amendments of 1976, Pub. L. No. 94-482, §125, 90 Stat. 2081 (1976)

Purpose:
TRIO includes a training program for project directors and other staff of TRIO projects *Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs*, which was authorized in 1976. The TRIO programs were administered by the Student Service area of the Department's Office of Postsecondary Education.
Added the fifth program to train staff. A distinct program differing from the student service focus of the prior four programs; this program serves staff with professional development opportunities.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.

Appendix F: Higher Education Amendment of 1980

Appendix F: Higher Education Amendment of 1980

Education Amendments of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-374, §405, 94 Stat. 1367 (1980)

Purpose:
A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to strengthen and improve the student loan programs to assure the availability of funds to students to attend the institution of higher education of their choice, to strengthen the procedures for the repayment of such loans, and for other purposes. Directs the Commissioner to make grants and contracts for special programs for disadvantaged students without regard to specified advertising requirements for Federal contracts. Authorizes appropriations for such program through the fiscal year 1985. The bill sets forth requirements for eligibility in the *Talent Search, Upward Bound, Special Services for Disadvantaged Students*, and *Educational Opportunity Centers* programs. Requires that specified percentages of those participating in such programs be low-income individuals. Authorizes the Commissioner to make grants to provide training for staff and leadership personnel in such programs. The bill amends the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 to direct the Student Loan Marketing Association to enter into agreements with eligible institutions for making low-interest loans to students directly through such institutions. Evolution
Defines a first-generation college student and low-income student. *Talent Search* introduced required assurance that at least two-thirds of program participants are first-generation and low-income. Participant ages 12-27, with six years of elementary education, completed. Upward Bound introduced services for students with limited English proficiency and implemented assurances on two-thirds and one-third of participants.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.

Appendix G: Higher Education Amendment of 1986

Appendix G: Higher Education Amendment of 1986

Higher Education Amendments of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-498, §401, 100 Stat. 1268 (1986)

Purpose:
Reauthorized and revised the Higher Education Act of 1984, and for other purposes.
Added the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program to foster doctoral degree attainment by students from underrepresented segments of society.
Title III: Institutional Aid - Amends title III (Institutional Aid) of HEA to revise institutional aid programs, especially about the development needs of historically black colleges and universities and other institutions with large concentrations of minority, low-income students. Includes as eligible institutions, for purposes of the title III part A (Strengthening Institutions) grants program, any institution of higher education which meets specified requirements and which has an enrollment of which at least: (1) 20 percent are Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Hispanic students, or combination thereof; (2) 60 percent are American Indian, or five percent Alaska Native or (3) five percent are Native Hawaiian, Asian American, American Samoan, Micronesian Guamian (Chamorro), or Northern Marianan, or any combination thereof. Establishes under title III part B, "Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities" (which replaces the current part B, Aid to Institutions with Special Needs). Defines a "part B institution" as any historically black college or university that was established before 1964 and whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans. The amendment set forth authorized uses for grants allotted to institutions under the part B program.
Defines a first-generation college student. "*Student Support Services*" replaces "*Special Services*" as the program name. Adds the sixth program, which supports students for preparation for graduate study through the doctorate. Specifies the required assurances on two-thirds, with the remaining one-third from a group that is underrepresented in graduate education.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.

Appendix H: Higher Education Amendment of 1992

Appendix H: Higher Education Amendment of 1992

Higher Education Amendments of 1992, Pub. L. No. 102-325, §402, 106 Stat. 448 (1992)

Purpose:
The bill sets Federal TRIO Programs, i.e., the revised and reauthorized Special Programs for Students for Disadvantaged Backgrounds. Extended through the fiscal year 1997 the authorization of appropriations for such programs.
Allows the Secretary to use not more than one-half of one percent of such funds to (1) obtained additional qualified readers and additional staff; (2) review applications; (3) increase the level of oversight monitoring; (4) support impact studies, program assessments, and reviews; and (5) provide technical assistance to potential applicants and current grantees. Requires priority to be given, in such expenditures, to the additional administrative requirements under this Act, outreach activities, and obtaining additional readers.
Revised provisions for Student Support Services program.
Added requirements for design goals of support services projects, including increased rates of college retention, graduation, and transfers from two- to four-year institutions, and institutional climates supportive of low-income and first-generation college students and individuals with disabilities. Added to permissible services of projects mentoring programs involving faculty and upper-class students.
Name change from "Disadvantaged Students" to "Student Support Serviced." The first instance of the "TRIO" name appeared in legislation. *Ronald E. McNair Scholars* replaced adopted as the new name for the Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, and the Department of Education adds the seventh program to evaluate programs and projects.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.

Appendix I: Higher Education Amendment of 1998

Appendix I: Higher Education Amendment of 1998

Higher Education Amendments of 1998, Pub. L. No. 105-244, §402, 112 Stat. 1581 (1998)

Purpose:

The Secretary shall encourage coordination of programs assisted under this chapter with other programs for disadvantaged students operated by the sponsoring institution or agency, regardless of the funding source of such programs. The Secretary shall not limit an entity's eligibility to receive funds under this chapter because such entity sponsors a program similar to the program to be assisted under this chapter, regardless of the funding source of such program. The Secretary shall permit the Director of a program receiving funds under this chapter to administer one or more additional programs for disadvantaged students operated by the sponsoring institution or agency, regardless of the funding sources of such programs.

Student Support Services, paragraph (6) of section 402D(c) (20 U.S.C. 1070a-14(c) (6)) is amended to read as follows:

consider, in addition to such other criteria as the Secretary may prescribe, the institution's effort, and where applicable to history, in--

providing sufficient financial assistance to meet the full financial need of each student in the project, and maintaining the loan burden of each such student at a manageable level.

Section 403 introduced the new program, *GEAR UP,* serving first-generation college, low-income schools, and communities. TRIO and *GEAR UP* are separate programs.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.

Appendix J: Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008

Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-315, §403, 122 Stat. 3078 (2008)

Purpose:
The president signed the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 into law on August 14, 2008. The bill included many new reporting requirements for institutions, grant programs for colleges and students, and provisions designed to lower the cost of a college education. It addresses simplifying the federal aid application, developing campus safety plans, and rules regarding relationships between higher education institutions and student lenders. The law also mandates studies on 24 topics, including articulation agreements, nursing school capacity, and the impact of student loan debt on public service.
Student Support Services, Section 402D (20 U.S.C.1070a–14) is amended—
To foster an institutional climate supportive of the success of students who are limited English proficient, students from groups that are historically underrepresented in postsecondary education, students with disabilities, students who are homeless children and youths.
Emphasize basic personal income, household money management, and financial planning skills; and basic economic decision-making skills;
Emphasized economic and financial literacy as a required service for *the Talent Search* and *Upward Bound* programs. Economic and financial literacy as permissible services for *the McNair* Scholars program. Economic literacy and financial literacy as the fourth purpose of the *Student Support Services* program. Economic literacy and financial literacy are added as the third purpose of the *Educational Opportunity Centers* program.

Note: Italicized font highlights program name.