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# First-generation College Students' Cultural and Social Capital: Activation, Management, and Acquisition at an Elite University

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First-generation College Students' Cultural and Social Capital: Activation, Management, and  
Acquisition at an Elite University

by

Brittany Nicole Ridge

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

in

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Lehigh University

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in Sociology.

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Acquisition at an Elite University

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## ABSTRACT

How do first-generation college students activate, manage, and accumulate cultural and social capital while negotiating their marginal identities in an elite university? This thesis analyzes students' capital acquisition through college experiences in a context of elite education that offers the unspoken promise of social mobility. Interviews were conducted with three cohorts of first-generation college students—first-year students, second- through four-year students, and degree holders—to determine how marginalized identities were negotiated at differing phases of college and beyond. In addition, quantitative data analysis of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) of 2003-2009 connects the interview data to the large scale processes occurring in elite universities across the United States. Social capital, including such experiences as student study groups, meetings with faculty, appointments with staff, and mentoring relationships, are explored to understand the impacts that these forms of social capital have on educational transitions and the persistence of social (im)mobility.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the mainstream media has published numerous news articles on the topic of first-generation college students. These articles note the disadvantages of low-income first-generation college students, particularly at more elite universities (Riggs 2014b) and discuss such issues as students' lack of familial and social support (Capó Cruet 2015) students' anomie originating from being the first in their families to attend college (Riggs 2014a) and the policies and programs (or lack thereof) that attempt to put an end to the problems faced by poor students at predominantly wealthy schools (Mitchell 2015). Growing public concern over issues faced by first-generation college students raises the question of how and when these challenges will be addressed by the national agenda and institutions of higher education. The challenges are pressing and fit into a broader context of educational inequality. High attrition rates across all postsecondary institutions and low matriculation rates in elite institutions of higher education expose the lack of breadth in current research.

While first-generation college students are over half of all students in postsecondary education, exclusionary practices are known to block their admittance into the more elite institutions. Those who receive admittance may think they have made it—that their American Dream and long-held belief in the meritocratic ethos has finally paid off. Instead, they are often confronted with educational stratification and social reproduction processes that were stacked against them long before they were granted access. The task of navigating through unfamiliar academic and social situations is often daunting and can result in extreme stress, or even in them leaving.

Research on first-generation college students has inadequately measured activation, management, accumulation of social and cultural capital through a sociological lens. And prior

research has not employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to understand the links between what is occurring at the micro-individual level and the macro-structural level. This study's use of a sociological analysis combined with mixed methods serves as a pastiche for future research development of first-generation and other marginalized students.

Recent data has provided us with broad patterns and trends of first-generation college student's experiences, but the statistics are qualifying. This study uses in-depth qualitative interviews with three cohorts of first-generation college students in an elite university: first-year students, second- through fourth-year students, and degree holders, to examine the social context of their experience. Scholars have found that activation of social and cultural capital is integral to securing opportunities (Calarco 2014, Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999, and Lareau 2000). However, in order to activate social and cultural capital, stock in capital needs to exist.

## BACKGROUND

Universities are largely composed of continuing-generation students and continuing-generation professors. The same system of institutional stratification that beckons students<sup>1</sup> also grants access to administrators who predominantly hold desirable characteristics of the upper middle class<sup>2</sup>. First-generation college students are underrepresented in elite colleges<sup>3</sup> and are far more likely to attend community college than their continuing-generation counterparts (Darling and Smith 2007). Research of first-generation college students at elite universities has recently

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<sup>1</sup> Elite institutions of education adapt their matriculating population of students by using social closure, "a process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it which it defines as inferior and ineligible" (Murphy 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Professors with degrees from elite institutions pervade the faculty population in elite universities, further exemplifying the system of institutional stratification (Swartz 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Three percent of students who have a family income in the lowest 25% attend the 146 most selective colleges and universities in the United States. The other approximately seventy-five percent of students come from families whose income is in the top 25% (Carnevale & Rose 2004 and Hurst & Warnock 2015).

begun to emerge in Sociology of Education. Although, there remains a discrepancy in our understanding of why they are underrepresented in elite institutions of higher education despite occupying nearly fifty percent of the total undergraduate population<sup>4</sup>. This ushers the question: how are first-generation college students granted access to elite institutions of higher education?

This study draws heavily upon theories first conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu, who presents theories on the various forms of capital<sup>5</sup> an individual can possess. Cultural<sup>6</sup> and social capital<sup>7</sup> are integral to this study, as is economic capital<sup>8</sup> due to its influence on the attainment of other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1990a). Cultural capital has cumulative effects over the course of socialization and once transferred, acts as a vehicle for social reproduction (Bourdieu 1985). Moreover, cultural capital actively creates hierarchal distinctions that reproduce social class and the system of stratification. Students with more cultural capital intrinsically know “the rules of the game” and are able to navigate education.

Scholars have found social and cultural capital acquisition to be a byproduct of class-based childrearing practices (Lareau 2011). First-generation college students are commonly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds,<sup>9</sup> but their socioeconomic statuses are recondite in elite institutions of higher education. How one attains social and cultural capital upon entering and inhabiting the institution of higher education remains an obscure question with no definitive answer. Given that most first-generation college students come from low-income families and

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<sup>4</sup> The Department of Education 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Capital is the totality of power an individual holds to transfer one form of capital into another to receive material or nonmaterial profits (Bourdieu 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Cultural capital takes shape in nonmaterial goods such as an individual’s education, verbal capabilities, mannerisms, aesthetic preferences, and other types of knowledge (Bourdieu 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Social capital is the institutionalized (any given social institution such as the family, the church, school, or tribe) recognition into a group of acquaintances. Social networks can be guaranteed with the association of a name (i.e. family surname or fraternity) (Bourdieu 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Economic capital is a form of material capital that refers to an individual’s wealth, income, and possessions (Bourdieu 1990a).

<sup>9</sup> Fifty percent of first-generation college students with dependent status had a family income below \$25,000/ year, 34% had an annual income of \$25,000- 49,999, 13% had an income of \$50,000- 79,999 and under 3% had an income of \$75,000 or more compared to their continuing generation counterparts with 7%, 25%, 32%, and 36% respectively (Chen 2005).

low-income students are underrepresented at elite institutions of higher education<sup>10</sup>, it follows that low-income first-generation college students attending elite universities are at a marked disadvantage when adjusting to their new environment composed primarily of upper middle class students<sup>11</sup>.

## PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to inform educators, institutions of education, and policy makers of the disparity of resources for first-generation college students in elite institutions. Certainly, past research has indicated the unequal opportunities and additional obstacles they face. In spite of the available research, there is a shortage of integrated approaches that seek measures of how and why first-generation college students struggle. Equally important, there is insufficient evidence of how to mend achievement and integration gaps. The qualitative interviews in this study feature first-generation college students who have participated in programs specifically designed for them and students not given the same opportunity. This provides a valuable measure of the efficacy of such programs. Do first-generation college students who participate in specialized programming have outcomes that differ from those who did not? If so, how did the influence of the program contribute to their activation, accumulation, and management of social and cultural capital?

This study explores cultural and social capital holdings upon matriculation and how this capital is accumulated during postsecondary education. I bring attention to the forms of capital accumulated, the avenues in which these forms of capital were attained, and how capital is

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<sup>10</sup> First-generation college students are underrepresented in elite colleges and are far more likely to attend community college than their continuing-generation counterparts (Darling and Smith 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Students from high income families are seven to eight times more likely to enroll in elite universities than their low income counterparts and this disparity has proliferated over time (Reardon, Baker and Klasik 2012).

managed. Moreover, I bring attention to the student's preexisting social and cultural capital repertoires. Cultural and social capital is often thought of as innately middle/ upper middle class predilections, but it is inherently distinct from social class<sup>12</sup>. These repertoires are juxtaposed with dominant forms of capital to distinguish how both are being activated, managed, and accumulated when being drawn upon. Additionally, this is analyzed to discern how social class is negotiated and what that means for the broader context of first-generation college students' placement in academic and family institutions.

Quantitative data analysis of the BPS complements the findings from the qualitative in-depth interviews. This data allows me to connect the micro (in-depth interview data from one elite institution) to the macro (BPS data from selective institutions of higher education across America) by comparing social capital represented by student study groups, formal and informal meetings with faculty, and appointments with staff, and the impact it has on life trajectories. This is essential to forming policies and programs that meet the needs of first-generation college students across the United States.

This study aims to better understand the experiences of first-generation college students by asking three questions: (1) How do first-generation college students in an elite university acquire social and cultural capital? (2) How do first-generation college students in an elite university activate cultural and social capital? (3) and How do first-generation college students in an elite university manage their social and cultural capital once acquired?

Scholarship contributing to the understanding of first-generation college students is critical to informing policies and practices to aid first-generation college students in

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<sup>12</sup> While the dominant cultures penchants for social behavior, norms, and values are superimposed on more "low-brow" ways of being, that does not negate the existence of working class forms of capital (Bourdieu 1985 and DiMaggio and Mohr 1985).

matriculation, integration, persistence, and retention. Attrition of first-generation college students is significantly higher than that of their continuing-generation counterparts: within four years 27.4% of first-generation students earn a degree while 42.1% of continuing-generation students graduate and after six years the percentages increase to 50.2% and 64.2% respectively<sup>13</sup>. The overall statistics are compelling; these numbers indicate a need to determine why these students are leaving college without a degree and how educational institutions can improve retention rates.

Low retention rates may be due to student's inability to socially integrate within the institution and/or the strain resulting from the student's changing relationship with friends and family<sup>14</sup>. Research can facilitate effective program practices for integration. The efficacy of such research cannot be measured without first establishing the needs of first-generation college students and forming programs around those needs. This study targets this exigency by analyzing the activation, management, and acquisition of cultural and social capital of first-generation college students in elite universities.

Moreover, this study seeks to address the relationship between forms of capital and life trajectories (degree persistence and social class upward mobility). This will serve as a determination of the relationship between activation, management, and accumulation and social mobility. Is social mobility stifled when forms of capital are not activated, managed, and/or accumulated? Furthermore, do students who have matriculated into elite universities have more stock in cultural and social capital upon entering than those who attend less selective colleges and universities?

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<sup>13</sup> Data from the BPS 03/09 indicated that only 10.9% of low-income first-generation college students and 24.9% of middle/high income first-generation students graduate within six years compared to 24.1% of low income continuing-generation students and 54% of middle/high income continuing-generation students (DeAngelo et. al 2011 and The Pell Institute 2011)

<sup>14</sup> Social integration has been found to be a key component to successful first-generation retention (Collier and Morgan 2007).

## SUMMARY

The principal purpose of this study is to identify the ways in which first-generation college students activate, accumulate, and manage social and cultural capital in order to matriculate into an elite university. Furthermore, sources of social and cultural capital are analyzed to determine how first-generation college students use these sources to navigate college. Finally, the research explores what happens to students when they do not know how to activate their sources capital. It is my intention to bring to light the ways in which first-generation college students overcome trials but also, how they become stifled by their new social sphere. With this research, I hope to provide new insights into how first-generation college students can be supported as they navigate unfamiliar territory and contribute to the existing body of research on first-generation college students in elite universities.

This thesis is organized in five chapters. In this chapter, I have provided a summation of the current research, illustrated the urgency of understanding first-generation college student specific issues, and provided an outline for the purpose of my research. The second chapter serves as a review of the current literature focusing on forms of capital, marginalization experienced by college students, and first-generation college student experiences. This chapter serves as the framework for my research, allowing me to build on pre-existing literature. In the third chapter, I provide details into my methodological approach for both the qualitative interviews and quantitative secondary data analysis of the BPS 03/09. The fourth chapter contains my findings and analysis of the data in six sections. The first four sections are dedicated to the qualitative interview data, the section that follows is dedicated to the quantitative findings, and



the final chapter provides a summary of the full analysis. In the fifth chapter, I conclude my research and provide suggestions for future research and program changes.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### THE FORMS OF CAPITAL

#### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital is understood to exist in three states, each of which requires economical capital as the primary impetus for accumulation (Bourdieu 1985). First, the *embodied* state of cultural capital includes the individual's investment in self-improvement such as cultivating hobbies and interests. Unlike other forms of capital, embodied capital is cultivated through time and merit. The requirement of agency makes it the most difficult form of capital to transfer. Second, the *objectified* state is the appreciation of cultural goods and materials such as books and instruments by those who hold the necessary levels of embodied capital<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, the *institutionalized* state encompasses cultural capital as academic credentials or qualifications that are legally binding<sup>16</sup>. Institutionalized forms of capital are transferable from the nonmaterial to material through the avenue of economic capital<sup>17</sup>.

Relative to social origins, cultural capital ensures the funneling of children into social class positions that are similar to that of their parents<sup>18</sup>. As stated by Dumais, "the acquisition of cultural capital and subsequent access to academic rewards depend upon the cultural capital

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<sup>15</sup> Embodied capital is the ability to not simply possess material goods but to know what to do with them (Bourdieu 1985).

<sup>16</sup> i.e. a degree or certificate that can be presented as proof of educational competence

<sup>17</sup> Institutional forms of capital generate the most profits when they are scarce (i.e. advanced degrees) (Bourdieu 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Asshaffenburg and Maas 1997

passed down by the family<sup>19</sup>, which in turn, is largely dependent on social class” (2002). Furthermore, the amount of cultural capital possessed is appreciable to the onset of the acquisition process<sup>20</sup>. While acquisition of cultural capital is a continual process (Bourdieu 1985) that occurs throughout college, achieving equilibrium with continuing-generation students may prove arduous if the accumulation of dominant forms of capital begins at matriculation. Furthermore, first-generation college students’ responsibilities outside of academia<sup>21</sup> may hamper the accumulation process. Scholarship in Sociology of Education has yet to examine this process of capital accumulation and preexisting forms of capital. I will bring this omission to the forefront of my research.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital is the totality of real or potential resources from membership in a group (Bourdieu 1985). The power of social capital depends upon the ability to gain “material or symbolic profits” from the relationships and the form of capital associated with membership (i.e. economic, cultural, or symbolic capital) (Bourdieu 1985). Parental investments in their child(ren)’s education and social network is transferable into academic achievements. First-generation college students, with a social network without (or limited in) institutionalized cultural capital, have fewer investments and therefore, less opportunity to generate educational profits. This serves to propagate educational stratification. The presence and activation of social capital is fundamental to social mobility (Hamilton 2013). Students with parents who have high

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<sup>19</sup> Social class, in and of itself, is a form of cultural capital (Lareau 1987).

<sup>20</sup> The family’s resources, specifically economic and free time, can augment the progression of acquisition (Bourdieu 1985, Calarco 2011, 2014; Dumais 2005; Lareau 1987, 2000, 2003)

<sup>21</sup> First-generation students are often minimally, or not at all, financially supported by their parents. They are more likely to hold fulltime jobs while attending college part-time, which directly interfere with their free time to make cultural capital gains (Darling and Smith 2007).

socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to graduate college, but they do so while scraping by academically<sup>22</sup>. However, the social networks they build and the resources they have, land them better, higher paying careers (Hamilton 2013).

### *Habitus*

Habitus is the embodiment of social structures that permeate the mind and body and produce dispositions, values, beliefs, and tastes (Bourdieu 1990a). Moreover, all forms of capital held by an individual contribute to their habitus. The habitus develops through socialization within the family and institutions of education reproduce the social structure<sup>23</sup>. When capital is present within the habitus, the individual must activate<sup>24</sup> their capital to benefit from its rewards (Calarco 2011 and Lareau 2000). Those with an advantageous habitus, can activate their capital by seeking others who hold similar advantages<sup>25</sup>. Likewise, interpersonal relationships are strongest when individuals possess similar amounts of capital<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, the juxtaposition of people with little capital holdings and people with replete capital further separates the groups, which in turn advances social mobility for advantaged groups (Collins and Makowsky 2010).

## MARGINAL STATUS OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Marginality is the exclusion of an individual from the dominant culture of the social structure they are occupying. Much of the current research of marginality in education focuses

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<sup>22</sup> Students with high SES parents are more likely than students with low SES parents to achieve GPAs that are just strong enough to obtain a degree (Hamilton 2013).

<sup>23</sup> The cultural repertoires build upon one another, shaping social advantages or disadvantages in the future. Dependent upon the base of the habitus (the family's measures of all forms of capital), the habitus can continue to advance or become stagnant (Bourdieu 1990a).

<sup>24</sup> Activation of cultural capital requires an individual to exhibit agency to receive the profits of capital (Calarco 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu states "...the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family. Moreover, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up" (1985).

<sup>26</sup> Lasting connections are more easily attainable with high levels of capital, which allow for the formulation of the requisite skills to maintain and have competence in social obligations (Bourdieu 1985).

on social class and race/ ethnicity. Despite the likelihood of samples consisting predominantly of first-generation college students<sup>27</sup>, first-generation status is commonly exempt. However, one study found that first-generation college students occupy "intersecting sites of oppression" (Lohfink and Paulsen 2005) due to their multiple marginal statuses. Some studies imply marginalization through evidence of penalties paid by first-generation college students<sup>28</sup>. To understand the complex issue of first-generation marginality, I will borrow from "The Marginal Man" by Robert E. Park.

Park affirmed that immigrants experience marginality<sup>29</sup> while living in two diverse social and cultural worlds, in which they are a stranger to the new world, and this straddling results in personality turmoil<sup>30</sup>. Like immigrants, first-generation college students enter the social sphere of higher education as a stranger and must straddle between their new and inherent identities. I hypothesize that emergence as a stranger results in negotiating integration, isolation, or assimilation-- a process witnessed amongst low-income black students at an elite university (Jack 2014). This study will identify those patterns, if such patterns exist. Additionally, it will highlight the role of social class and life trajectories in such patterns. Through my research, I intend to answer if first-generation college students adopt feelings of marginality, and if so, how their identity influences their educational attainment.

Park believed the new social order introduces desirable changes in the individual, allowing for transcendence (Park 1928). When applied to education, Bourdieu, who believed

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<sup>27</sup> First-generation students are overrepresented amongst minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (Bui 2002, Choy 2001, Darling and Smith 2007, and Engle 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Past studies indicate these students are penalized in preparation for higher education, familial and institutional financial support, degree expectations, degree persistence and rates, social and cultural integration, basic knowledge of the transition process, and the transition into the workforce when compared to their continuing-generation counterparts (Pascarella et al. 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Park described marginality as the result of uprooting into a homogenous location, of which an individual's status (typically race/ ethnicity) has limited political and social power, leaving much of their home identity behind (Park 1928).

<sup>30</sup> In his words, the marginal man "lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a stranger (Park 1928)

social stratification and cultural reproduction is greatest in institutions of education<sup>31</sup>. This suggests that access to resources fissures after admission and the system of stratification persists, rather than transcends inequalities<sup>32</sup>. As a result, resources available prior to matriculation matter in educational and career opportunities. Adam Weisberger found an additional discrepancy in Park's work, stating that the marginal man is not only a stranger to their new world, but also becomes a stranger to their roots with the added influence of their new culture (Weisberger 1992).

Weisberger explains: "The marginal person is not only unable to sever ties with his or her own culture and to merge into the new one, *but also is unable to return to the native culture or shrug off the influence of the new one*. ...the marginal person is caught in a cross-current, located within a *structure of double ambivalence* (P. 429)" (Weisberger 1992). I hypothesize that first-generation college students, like immigrants, experience this double ambivalence. Supporting my hypothesis is a study that found upward mobility in first-generation students prompts severed ties with friends and family from first-generation student's pre-college life when feelings of lack of support emerge (London 1989 and Darling and Smith 2007). As an additional consequence, alienation absorbed from both the institution and the family may cause first-generation students to drop out (London 1989).

## CAPITAL ATTAINMENT

### *Social and Cultural Capital in Adolescence*

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<sup>31</sup> (Swartz 1977) The institution of education "maintains the preexisting social order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital. More precisely, by a series of selection operations, the system separates holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences" (Bourdieu 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Persons with high levels of capital holdings are better able to secure opportunities for themselves through activation (Calarco 2014, Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999, and Lareau 2000), than those with less stock in capital (Jack 2014).

Annette Lareau, Jessica McCrory Calarco, and other scholars have identified roles of parental transmission of cultural capital and the impact of such on their children's education. Parents with low SES engage in passive parenting styles, allowing children freedom to schedule their own activities. When confronted with institutions, low SES parents depend on teachers and faculty for the full education of their children (Lareau 2000), creating a sense of powerlessness for parents and students (Lareau 2003). As a result, working class students have infrequent, delayed and impersonal help-seeking strategies. Help is often secured when unsolicited from the teacher (Calarco 2011). Furthermore, low SES parents refrain from securing opportunities for their children which can have implications for educational transitions. In the context of college expectations, working class parents focus on the completion of high school, but have few expectations for college. This establishes a child's lack of will to continue (Lareau 2000) and hinders their ability to successfully navigate education (Lareau 2003).

Middle class children frequently ask for help, diversify their strategies, and are proactive and persistent. Additionally, they are assertively approach teachers, call out answers or questions, seek clarification, and make eye contact when receiving help. In pursuance of activating cultural capital, students strategize based on the institutional surroundings and seek arrangements based on their social class (Calarco 2011). The dichotomy of low SES and high SES students' help-seeking strategies create stratified profits and disadvantages through the activation of cultural capital (Calarco 2011 and Lareau 1987, 2000). High SES children perform better in school, speak with a greater breadth of vocabulary, and participate in more activities than their low SES counterparts (Lareau 2003). In addition, middle class children exhibit the requisite skills to navigate institutions of education, as well as other institutions<sup>33</sup>. Does social

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<sup>33</sup> Children are adept to reasoning and negotiating with adults, formulating their own opinions, and are persistent in following parent formulated schedules (Lareau 2003).

class socialization transcend adolescence and create marked disadvantages and advantages in higher education?

### *Cultural and Economic Capital in Higher Education*

We know from other studies that parents access both material (economic capital) and nonmaterial (cultural capital) resources to aid in the development of educational skills, navigation, and sociability of their children (Teachman 1987). This finding supports Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and exposes the financial burden faced by low SES first-generation students. Additionally, parental aid increases the likelihood of degree completion (Hamilton 2013). Linkages between socioeconomic class and access to institutions of higher education signify implicit reproduction of social inequality.

Exclusionary practices such as high tuition rates and requiring high SAT or ACT scores thwart access to students from low SES backgrounds (Alon 2009). High tuition rates place the responsibility of covering costs on parents<sup>34</sup> and/or the student who must secure student loans. This may provide a partial explanation for the underrepresentation of first-generation college students in elite institutions of higher education<sup>35</sup>. While economic capital is an important factor in degree completion, other forms of capital transfers increase matriculation into elite universities<sup>36</sup>.

How does cultural capital, developed in adolescence and supported by parental influences, shape educational transitions? Scholars have found students' participation in

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<sup>34</sup> It is common for higher SES parents to save money and plan for their children to attend college which further implicates access for students of a lower SES and parents who provided their children with considerable levels of support throughout college were more likely to have had parents who provided them with support during their time in college (Hamilton 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Carnevale & Rose 2004 and Hurst & Warnock 2015

<sup>36</sup> Admission to an elite university is not improved by student's participation in the arts but parental participation does increase the chance of being admitted to an elite university (Kaufman and Gabler 2004).

“highbrow” activities to be an insignificant factor in the transition to college,<sup>37</sup> but they disagree on whether the parent’s participation or the parent and child’s participation together are the strongest indicator (Ashaffenburg and Mass 1997 and Kaufman and Gabler 2004). One study found parental, rather than the child’s, participation in highbrow activities is a greater predictor of successful educational transitions but greatest when both parents and children participate (Ashaffenburg and Mass 1997). Conversely, another finding indicates that museum going is a strong predictor of elite college admissions when both the parents and child participate but strongest when only the parent participates (Kaufman and Gabler 2004). To their detriment, first-generation college students are unlikely to have parents who participate in “highbrow” activities, and further, the resources to participate in them with their parents.

### *Cultural and Social Capital and First-Generation College Students*

It is widely understood that campus participation builds social networks and allows students to draw upon their cultural resources, furthering social reproduction (Stuber 2009). When compared to their continuing-generation counterparts, first-generation college students are less likely to participate in extra-curricular, exclusive clubs and Greek life, and volunteer activities (Pascarella et al. 2004 and Stuber 2011). Continuing-generation college students are adept to campus participation, while first-generation college students’ cultural dispositions and social networks thwart access (Stuber 2009). Campus resources and programs for first-generation college students aid in propagating social networks and participation. However, continuing-

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<sup>37</sup> Children who participate in highbrow activities such as painting and sculpture classes held unequal advantages in educational transitions to those who did not participate. The greatest effect was seen in children who were twelve years old or younger but with diminishing effects in later transitions (entering college and graduating college). Participating more than once created cumulative effects that did aid in later transitions (Ashaffenburg and Mass 1997). Elite college admissions are significantly higher when students participate in “middlebrow” activities such as hobby clubs (Kaufman and Gabler 2004).



generation students draw on the same or similar resources that further their cultural and social capital (Stuber 2009).

Although seemingly mundane, the dorm room selection processes can be a source of social capital<sup>38</sup>. Disparities in dorm room selection separate middle class students from working class students, who are often first-generation<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, middle class students gravitate towards housing options that support university involvement and social opportunities while working class students share spaces with other disadvantaged students who lack information pertaining to school involvement (Stuber 2015). This begs the question, how do first-generation college students activate social capital if manifested exclusionary practices pervade higher education?

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, the primary focus is semi-structured in-depth interviews with first-generation college students. Current students and alum with first-generation status construct a picture of social mobility through personal narratives at differing phases of the life course. I use pre-selected questions covering broad topics, allowing me the freedom to formulate individualized questions while covering all important topics and not interrupting the natural flow of the interview. Prior to each interview, interviewees received two copies<sup>40</sup> of the consent form and were given a verbal disclaimer of the information provided in the consent form. They had an

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<sup>38</sup> Students who have the requisite network prior to enrolling, are advantaged in the selection process through recommendations from friends and family. Additionally, Stuber found that this results in social class segregation in campus housing in both small liberal arts colleges and large state universities (Stuber 2015).

<sup>39</sup> First-generation and low-income college students are more likely to live off campus than their continuing-generation and high-income college students counterparts (Pascarella et al. 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Note: One copy will be for my records and the other will be theirs to keep.

opportunity to ask questions before proceeding with the interview. Pseudonyms were given for the institution and all participants. At times, I changed or omitted additional information<sup>41</sup> for the security of individuals. These changes are indicated in footnotes and in brackets in direct quotes from the participants.

To supplement this data, I conducted a secondary data analysis of the 2003- 2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). This study demonstrates the association between social capital in the form of student experiences, their generational status, and outcomes. The quantitative data supplied by the BPS is used to compare and contrast the patterns discovered in one elite American university to elite institutions across America. Race and gender are important factors in first-generation status. However, the sample size is too small to be representative. Therefore, the disclosure of the race and gender of individuals has limited analysis from the qualitative data and will be used as controls for the quantitative data. Furthermore, I discuss economic capital but the depth of the discussion is in relation to the activation, management, and acquisition of cultural and social capital.

## SAMPLE SELECTION

### *Institution*

Wellborn University<sup>42</sup> is a university located in the northeastern region of the United States. It is regularly ranked amongst the top universities in the United States by ranking sources such as U.S. News, Forbes, and the Princeton Review. The private institution is highly selective, has an endowment of over \$1 billion annually, and a large student body of STEM majors. This university was chosen for its elite status and my personal connections to a Wellborn University

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<sup>41</sup> Note: This may include names of school clubs that the student participated in, names of places of employment, and other potentially identifiable information.

<sup>42</sup> Note: Wellborn University is a pseudonym for the university in this study.

professor. The university offers a summer program for entering first-generation college students that prepares them for social and academic life. This program has been given the pseudonym Wellborn University Student Achievement Program or WUSAP. Throughout this thesis, it will be referred to as WUSAP. The program, as it stands today, is in its second year of practice. However, similar programs focusing on low-income students were implemented in prior years.

### *Participants*

Participants for this study were chosen based on their first-generation college student status, attendance at Wellborn University, and the length of their educational career. I divided a total of fourteen participants into three cohorts: First year students, second through fourth-year students, and degree holders. My reasons for separating students into cohorts is fourfold: (1) a more desirable longitudinal qualitative study is not feasible for a master's thesis, (2) social mobility is a primary measure, which calls for students who are at various places in their educational careers, (3) each cohort consists of students with unique characteristics based on the year of first matriculation, and (4) the arrangement of each cohort considers the students' ability to reflect on recent events as well as their ability to recall past events. First-year students are most familiar with the challenges of transitioning to college, and for this reason, they belong to their own cohort. Second<sup>43</sup> through fourth-year students are grouped into one cohort. While still familiar with the challenges of entering college, they may not recall all the initial obstacles. Furthermore, they will have additional experiences as they have progressed in their educational

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<sup>43</sup> Note: Due to their involvement in a first-generation summer program, I considered grouping first-year and second-year students together. However, I felt that differentiating between initial experiences-- while still embedded in a new environment-- and second year experiences would be more fruitful than classifying the students by their participation in the program

careers. Lastly, I chose degree earners as a means to measure life trajectories after degree attainment.

Acquisition of participants occurred through two methods of convenience sampling based on the specific population of interest. A convenience sample of entering first-generation students was chosen from their participation in a summer program designed to mentor, orient, and prepare first-generation college students with academic and social life at the university. Through initial contact, the coordinator of this program agreed to distribute information about the study. In exchange for access, I have offered to volunteer at events and perform other program duties. With the help of the distribution of materials and my program appearances, I secured three entering first-generation college students and five second-year students who met the criteria for participation in this study.

All other students were convenience sampled through my connection to a Wellborn University professor. From this, two fourth-year students were chosen to participate. Due to the studies focus on life trajectories and attainment of social mobility, I selected four participants who have graduated from Wellborn University. Degree holders received their degrees between 2005 and 2015.

#### *Sampling Procedure for the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study*

The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) surveys students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in the 2003-2004 school year in the United States<sup>44</sup>. Students are followed for six years (until 2009). The initial cohort (first time beginning postsecondary students in the 2003-04 school year) is drawn from the National Postsecondary

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<sup>44</sup> Note: This includes the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Student Aid Study (NPSAS), a nationally representative study of postsecondary students and institutions (The Department of Education 2011). The BPS, with an initial cohort of 23,090 respondents, conducted in-person quantitative interviews every three years (The Department of Education 2011).

My analytical sample includes only students who attended very selective and moderately selective bachelor's degree granting not-for-profit institutions<sup>45</sup>. These parameters were chosen as a means to make the sample data most closely reflect the characteristics of the elite bachelor's degree granting university, Wellborn University, the research site for the qualitative portion of this study. The total sample size is 6,530 respondents<sup>46</sup>. After eliminating those who are missing, measures of social capital (informal meetings with faculty in 2006, talking with faculty outside of class in 2006, met with academic advisor in 2006, and studied in groups in 2006) 6,320 cases are used in the analysis. Additionally, in a logistic regression analysis, I also run one model containing only first-generation college students with a sample size of 1,620 and another, only continuing-generations students had a sample size of 4,690.

## VARIABLES

### *Bachelor's Degree Attainment in 2009*

The dependent variable, bachelor's degree attainment in 2009, is a dummy variable. Students with no degree, an associate's degree, and undergraduate certificates were treated as having no bachelor's degree (coded as 0). Bachelor's degree completed includes those who

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<sup>45</sup> Included in the analysis are institutions with the Carnegie 2000 codes: Doctoral/ Research Universities—Extensive, Doctoral/ Research Universities—Intensive, Master's Colleges and Universities I, Master's Colleges and Universities II, Baccalaureate Colleges—Liberal Arts, Baccalaureate Colleges—General, and Baccalaureate/ Associate's Colleges (See The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning 2001 for full list of classifications).

<sup>46</sup> All sample sizes have been rounded to 10s in compliance with NCES restricted-access data requirements.

obtained a bachelor's degree or higher by 2009, or within six years of initial matriculation (coded as 1). The dependent variable was chosen to compare bachelor's degree attainment amongst first-generation and continuing-generation students. Furthermore, using degree completion as the dependent variable helps to answer the main research question of whether social capital is a valuable resource that can help first-generation students obtain a bachelor's degree.

### *Student Generation Status*

The primary independent variable is student generation status with first-generation college students (FGS) coded as 1. For the purposes of this study, first-generation college students are defined as students whose parents have not received a college degree<sup>47</sup> in the United States by the time the student entered college. Continuing-generation college students (CGS)<sup>48</sup> (coded as 0) are defined as students with at least one degree-holding parent, including an Associate's degree, in the United States by the time the student has matriculated<sup>49</sup>.

### *Measures of Social Capital*

Four independent variables serve as measures of social capital: the frequency respondents (1) had informal meetings with faculty, (2) talked to faculty outside of class, (3) met with an academic advisor, and (4) studied in groups. All four variable have three possible answers: never, sometimes, and often.

### *Control Variables*

All models contain gender and race as control variables.

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<sup>47</sup> Note: This does not include completion of trade or vocational schools.

<sup>48</sup> Continuing- generation students are also known as "non-first-generation" students and "traditional students."

<sup>49</sup> Note: Students who did not list their parents' educational attainment will not be included.

## DATA ANALYSIS OF BPS AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The relationship between the dependent and independent variables are measured using logistic regression methods. All statistical analyses were conducted in STATA version 13 on a password-protected stand-alone desktop with no internet access. In-depth interviews were analyzed using ATLAS.ti version 7. Five interviews were fully transcribed and nine were partially transcribed using Express Scribe Pro Software. All interview files were stored on a password-protected secure server.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### GUARDIAN MENTORS

Social capital allows for actors, or those benefitting from the social connection, to secure resources that aid them in achieving their goals. The usefulness of the social capital is dependent upon the social structure in which the connection exists. Once activated, use of social capital along with other resources in the pursuance of additional forms of capital produce different (often times beneficial) outcomes for actors. The value of the outcome, once again, is dependent upon the social structure (Coleman 1988). Connections made in primary or secondary education are most valuable in those institutions. It follows that mentor/mentee relationships formed in K-12 education will be at their pinnacle of social and cultural accumulation while the mentee is in the mentor's immediate milieu.

Of the study participants, Cecilia and Miranda had the strongest relationships with their mentors. Both participants' mentors acted as guardians of the students, often assuming a parental role. Thus, due to the extensive personal nature of these relationships these mentors have been termed "guardian mentors." By activating the social capital brought on by their mentor arrangements, they were in a position to accumulate additional social and cultural capital rewards in their transition to college. Acting as gatekeepers for Wellborn University, their mentors helped to catalyze their educational trajectories and endow them with the skills necessary to matriculate at an elite university.

### *Cecilia*

Cecilia's mentor, Ms. Shelton, was her eighth grade English teacher and was instrumental in helping Cecilia succeed. Prior to enrollment, Ms. Shelton aided in her transition to college by increasing her engagement in the college selection process. Cecilia's parents work long shifts in a factory and did not have the time or resources needed to drive her to campus visits or to Wellborn for the WUSAP program. Furthermore, her school did not provide resources for such visits. Without the help of Ms. Shelton, Cecilia may not have been able to secure transportation in order to participate in WUSAP. Her social capital was transferable into cultural capital through participation in college experiences.

Interviewer: Aside from the things already mentioned, are there any other ways that she (Ms. Shelton) has helped you?

Cecilia: So like um when I was applying she like um actually drove me up here and we took a tour and she took me to um—what was the other college? [Medium sized public university in the North East] and then um when I got into like the [WUSAP] program my parents were not able to like drive me up here so she took the time to come and like drop me off. And she comes and visits once and awhile.



These experiences changed Cecilia's educational trajectory. Students with college educated parents are more likely than their first-generation counterparts to rely on the knowledge of their parents in making college decisions. Conversely, first-generation college students are more likely to rely on the suggestions of other adults who have attended college and resources such as campus visits (Galotti and Mark 1994). Visiting college campuses gave Cecilia the cultural competency to determine which school would best meet her needs as a student. Additionally, by taking part in WUSAP, Cecilia gained valuable knowledge of academic life at Wellborn, formed friendships, and had additional time to adjust to the campus.

Still in close contact with Ms. Shelton, Cecilia describes the management of the relationship with her mentor as being significant:

Cecilia: So we still like go out and get coffee or—and she met my parents and um we have like a friendship now because I'm older but um she's very close. We're very close and like, I like her a lot. She's very important to me. She helped me a lot. She's always motivating me and just sending me little cards like "I hope your exams are going well" or something.

Managing her social ties to her mentor has allowed her to receive emotional and academic support while in college. While her parents believe in her ability to succeed, they cannot understand the academic pressures Cecilia faces.

In addition to being a strong support system, strong mentors can also be a source of social capital accumulation. Cecilia's English teacher and mentor Ms. Shelton, introduced her to Ms. Abby. Serving students in the local community, Ms. Abby held workshops and provided college counseling. She functioned as an asset in Cecilia's college application process, allowing her to accumulate cultural capital in much the same way as Miranda:

Interviewer: How did your school prepare you for the college application process?

Cecilia: Um that was outside school. So like we had very, very few counselors so I kinda went out on my own and looked. Like my English teacher told me to go to the Boys and Girls club and a lady um there... that used to be a counselor—she retired—had like a program. Like she would help you with applications and kinda just like letting you know everything you need to do to prepare for college. So everything with college was done outside of school.

Through the social capital activated by her relationship with Ms. Shelton, Cecilia accumulated additional social and cultural capital, allowing her to secure opportunities for herself. Cecilia remains in contact with Ms. Abby and informed me during our interview that she would be meeting with her the following day for lunch.

Cecilia and Miranda attended underfunded public high schools with few resources. There were far too few counselors for the number of students and seeking outside resources became a necessity for the college application process.

Interviewer: Did your school prepare you for college the application process or SATs?

Cecilia: No, no all of that was the lady (Ms. Abby). No, all of that was all her.

Cecilia and Miranda have both expressed their need to stay in continued contact with their mentors. However, they have both struggled with forming new relationships with professors on campus. While in high school, their mentors acted as gatekeepers to additional social and cultural capital resources, but their weak ties to the university could not provide the same level of capital transfer. As a result, their relationships with professors are more formal rather than personal:

Interviewer: Can you describe your relationship with your professors?

Cecilia: Um I really don't like know many of them like personally. Um I have become closer to my chem professor. I think because I go a lot to her office hours, but like besides that like just kinda like when I ask for help.

Neither student expresses the same level of excitement towards their newly formed relationships with professors. While they are accumulating a greater social network, it is unclear whether or not they are able to activate additional forms of capital from these relationships. Additionally, both students are unsure of their academic future.

Although she wants to be a doctor, Cecilia has not enrolled in a pre-med program. However, her involvement in two university health/medical clubs suggests that she is continuing to pursue a career in the medical field. In high school, she volunteered at a hospital but has not volunteered at a hospital since enrolling at Wellborn. Cecilia's interests in college are primarily geared towards understanding her ethnicity. An immigrant from Mexico, Cecilia has taken advantage of the many cultural resources Wellborn has to offer. She joined a multicultural sorority and is actively involved in the university's Office of Multicultural Affairs. Additionally, she is undeclared but is primarily taking courses in sociology and anthropology while struggling to complete the science pre-requisites for medical school. The social and cultural capital formed from her participation in these activities will help shape her identity. However, it is unclear how or if these resources will help her in pursuing her career and academic interests.

### *Miranda*

Miranda's relationship with her mentor Ms. Carter, is unique in that Ms. Carter provides her with emotional, academic, and financial support. In every sense of the word, Ms. Carter is her guardian, and Miranda refers to her as her "titi" (Spanish slang for "aunt") and Godmother. Like Cecilia, Miranda met her mentor in 8<sup>th</sup> grade:

Interviewer: Was there anyone in particular who really sticks out as a mentor to you?

Miranda: Definitely right now it's my 8th grade teacher. She was the first one to believe in me um and she's my Godmother now. [...] again my parents are not still active-- they're not active in my academic life [...] she helps me with all she can cause she actually went to college and you know she actually does want to help me. She helps me financially, mentally, and all that so it's... I'm very, very grateful.

It is common for low SES parents to rely on the school for the full education of their child(ren) (Lareau 2000). In Miranda's experience, her parents have kept the school and home spheres separate, thereby requiring Miranda to seek guidance from her teachers. In addition to academic support, Miranda confided in Ms. Carter for emotional support when experiencing turmoil at home:

Interviewer: Can you talk more about her and the support that she has given you?

Miranda: So it all started at like my 8th grade graduation, which was my first official United States graduation, and my parents didn't come to my graduation. [...] the situation that happened, [...] that's when stuff started happening in the house and it started bleeding through me like you could tell something was wrong so she provided that emotional support since then and then in high school. I would just talk to her and visit her, you know, because she put time and effort into me.

An immigrant from South America, Miranda moved with her father, stepmother, half-brother, and half-sister to the United States when she was in first grade. Her mother and her two half-brothers on her mother's side of the family remained in a rural impoverished community in South America. When a family situation shook her father's household, Miranda moved back to South America with her mother only to return a year later. Upon her return, she once again connected with Ms. Carter who continued to act as her guardian all throughout high school and now, college. The level of trustworthiness (Coleman 1988) and time spent on relationships (Gaddis 2012) is in and of itself a form of social capital. Miranda's sustaining relationship with Ms. Carter and the foundation of trust, equips her with the confidence to seek emotional support.

Ms. Carter and Miranda speak almost daily. The pressure of college life has resulted in frequent anxiety and depression, increasing her need for support. Due to a strained relationship with her parents, Miranda relies on Ms. Carter to help her through difficult times. Moreover, Miranda spends holidays and university breaks with her mentor. Ms. Carter typically provides transportation for these breaks, which Miranda acknowledges as being representative of their close relationship:

Interviewer: So when you do visit her um how do you get there?

Miranda: She comes and picks me up most of the time. Now more recently like I have to take the bus because, you know, she does work on Mondays and she has to stay after school, but most of the time she comes and picks me up, which again, another thing she's willing to do. Like drive 90 minutes, 90 minutes back and forth! Like what?!

Through repeated contact, they have managed their relationship and formed a bond consistent with kinship. Ms. Carter is more than just a mentor to Miranda, they have become a family.

The continued maintenance of relationships over time changes its *durability*, or its ability to extract rewards from the connection. Limited durability often occurs in friendships, losing value over time as repeated extractions are made. Conversely, strong family ties are *endurable*, or the social capital from those connections allows for repeated use over time without changing the levels of trust within the relationship (Robison, Schmid and Siles 2002). In its current state, Miranda and Ms. Carter's relationship appears to be *endurable*:

Interviewer: She has been very willing to give you that kind of support?

Miranda: [...] you know me and my best friend, who I consider like my sister, she's like her—in a way she takes—in a way she takes care of both of us, you know? So she, she was like “the Lord sent me for you guys to take care of you guys for now,” you know? All she wants in return from us is to not put her in an old senior citizen home. That all she ask[s] but yeah she's, she's more than willing. She doesn't even blink an eye.

Expressing her desire for Miranda and Miranda's friend to not place her in a nursing home in the future represents Ms. Carter's aspiration to sustain the relationship for a lifetime and for her to extract future rewards when Miranda is in a position to provide for her. As much as Miranda looks to Ms. Carter as a mother figure, Ms. Carter also admires Miranda as if she were her own daughter.

In addition to the academic and emotional support Ms. Carter has given, she has also been Miranda's primary financial support. While her parents have given her approximately \$900 during her time in college (two years), her mentor gives her almost \$1,000 an academic month.

Interviewer: You mentioned that she has financially provided for you, what does that look like?

Miranda: Like she, she has bought me clothes, food, um also given me money to like do laundry. I need my books, especially this week. They're already assigning homework and he (her father) said no. [...] she has bought me my books before and all that. So in a way all around, she has provided for me financially.

Financial support during college from guardians who formed their relationships organically has not been examined in sociological research. Financial support (including tuition and cost of living) from parents in college is associated with an increased likelihood of the student graduating with a bachelor's degree but with a lower GPA than those whose primary source of financial aid was from grants and/or loans (Hamilton 2012). This begs the question: Are students who receive financial support from guardians just as likely as those students who receive financial support from their parents to receive a bachelor's degree? Furthermore, what affect does this have on the student's GPA? Although there is not sufficient evidence to support this relationship, Miranda's struggles with academia are notable.

In high school Miranda volunteered at a science museum and developed an appreciation for engineering. Unable to keep up with a mechanical engineering major workload, Miranda's GPA dropped and she changed her major to undeclared:

Interviewer: What is your subject of study?

Miranda: Um so right now I'm undeclared because I came in with engineering and I was not ready for engineering [...] unfortunately I have to switch from that and I say unfortunately because those years that I was in [local science museum] I was also discovering what to study and no one told me to go into engineering. I developed a love for it through volunteering at the science museum and seeing what can happen and talking to people. So now I'm undeclared and also with a sense of loss because now I don't know what I want to do. I don't know what I'm good at. That's the only thing consistent that was in my life and now it's not so I feel like why am I even in college, you know?

At the time of our interview in the spring semester of her sophomore year, Miranda had no formal plans to declare a major. Formally declaring a major ensures that all requirements are met in a timely manner. Without a declaration of major, students risk not graduating within four years. Furthermore, she has failed courses and is unsure of if she belongs in college, which speaks to a larger epidemic in first-generation college student attrition rates.

Within four years only 27.4% of first-generation college students earn a degree while 42.1% of continuing-generation college students earn a degree (DeAngelo et. al 2011). Even with a guardian mentor who holds a college degree, Miranda is struggling to place both feet on the ground in college. Her guardian mentor intervention has undoubtedly helped her throughout her transitions, but this cannot fully replace the social capital endowments from parents with college degrees. While both provide exposure, the level of exposure cannot replace growing up in a college educated family. One's social class is in and of itself, a form of social capital (Lareau

1987) and without that basis, interventions are a means of “catching up” but cannot replace the benefits of being born into the middle class.

Miranda has not been able to find her niche at Wellborn despite having a long history of overcoming adversity. Throughout high school, she had a large social network of teachers and peers. In addition to Ms. Carter, Ms. Lemon played an influential role in Miranda’s successful transition from high school to college. Miranda’s cousin had developed a relationship with Ms. Lemon and recommended that Miranda reach out to her. Furthermore, Miranda accumulated cultural capital through her involvement in a pre-college preparation program that Ms. Lemon directed:

Interviewer: And [pre-college preparation program], how did you find out about that program and join?

Miranda: Um actually I, cause the teacher who ran it, um one of my cousins he went to the school previously and he always was talking about... she's like his favorite teacher and I ran into her in the library and I told her and she was like “oh, you should come to the meeting” and then after I went to the meetings consecutively and then put in my part as a general body member and participating and helping with fundraising I became part of the e-board.

Prior to attending Wellborn, Miranda had numerous sources of social capital, primarily from her teachers. These sources of capital allowed her to accumulate additional forms of capital.

Her participation in college preparation program club gave her the skills necessary to apply to college. Despite her propensity to form these relationships during her adolescent education, she has not been able to continue forming relationships in college. Finding it difficult to connect with people at Wellborn, she has not formed any close relationships with students or professors.



## *Summary*

Cecilia and Miranda have relied heavily on their relationships with their mentors for their emotional well-being, academic success—and in the case of Miranda—financial support. The academic support they received in high school was beneficial in their transition to college, but their cultural capital accumulation from those relationships became negligible upon matriculation. Unlike Miranda, Cecilia has formed friendships with many of her peers. These relationships may provide sources of social capital activation and accumulation but from the interview, it was unclear of how these relationships may serve to benefit her.

Both Miranda and Cecilia struggled with activating social capital with their professors. When they do meet with professors, it is reactionary rather than proactive. When they struggle with their work, they seek help to see where they have gone wrong, rather than seeking help to ensure they are moving in the right direction. They have both successfully maintained the social capital they have. However, they struggle with activating and accumulating new forms of social and cultural capital. This is particularly true for cultural capital. In college, strong relationships with professors and administrators can provide cultural knowledge for navigation. As evidence of this disparity, Miranda and Cecilia are undecided in their major and unsure of their next step to choosing a major.

## AGGREGATE MENTORS

Most participants in this study were found to have several adults who mentored them. This could be a combination of teachers, coaches, grandparents, neighbors, guidance counselors, and/or family members. I have termed their network of mentors “aggregate mentors.” Students with these social connections often have mentors for different areas of their lives. This allows them to find different strengths in each individual mentoring relationship and to play on those specific strengths.

### *Andre*

Once a child living in project housing in Philadelphia, Andre seemed to fit right into the hustle and bustle of high class Manhattan living. Now a software salesman, he spoke elegantly while smiling and holding his eye contact. He remained positive throughout our interview despite describing race and social class obstacles he has had to overcome throughout his life. In college, he welcomed these moments of misunderstandings from his peers as teaching opportunities:

Andre: So like if there were things that were coming up were like—luckily for me, or not luckily for me—I’m not easily offended per say and like a lot of time I like will step back and have a more like empathetic viewpoint of someone's ignorance... at first. I'll take that moment to like teach them or tell them like "yo, that's not cool" and like "here's why." And then from there I expect you to like, now that you know better, to do better so that we don't run into the same situations again.

Andre is no stranger to being black from a working class background in white upper-middle class social spaces. He describes his first year at Wellborn as “an amplified version of what it was like going to fifth grade for the first time.” Although his 5-12 school was more racially diverse than Wellborn, it was still primarily white and middle/ upper-middle class.

Attending the school prepared him to represent his background while respecting the backgrounds of others.

The highly ranked magnet school Andre attended equipped him with the skills and knowledge necessary to attend Wellborn University. Several studies have found that students in magnet schools outperform their public school educated counterparts in reading (Blank et. al 1983 and Bifulco et. al 2009), math (Blank et. al 1983; Betts 2006 and Bifulco et. al 2009), and social studies (Gamoran 1996). Furthermore, Magnet schools have been found to have high performing students who value their education, satisfied parents, and teachers who empower their students (Flaxman et. al 1997 and Orfield 2013). Throughout our interview Andre stressed the impact his teachers have had on him. He gives names of several teachers but two teachers stick out: his 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Goodell and his economics teacher—who was also his basketball coach—Mr. Brinley. He remains in contact with both teachers. Ms. Goodell helped Andre to have a smooth transition from his public school to the magnet school:

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about her (Ms. Goodell)?

Andre: [...] It was the first time I went to school with um kids of other races and other um ethnicity's and it's really cool to see cause like at that age being exposed to it like it wasn't—like you start to learn that like people are different—and that seems like such a simple thing that we all know now but when you're so used to seeing everyone that looks like you doing the same thing, going to the same places, and then you go to school with people that are different than you... um that's been kinda rocky a little bit and uh I think that she did a great job of just like being in tune with all of us as students um during that transition. [...] You know, it was definitely harder than the elementary school I previously come from and like more was expected of you and demanded of you. And I think she did a really great job um of making sure that kids progressed and um yeah. She was great.

In addition to keeping him motivated, Ms. Goodell also helped him to integrate into his new school. Andre had previously gone to a primarily black school where his race and culture

were well represented. It is unclear of how exactly Ms. Goodell helped him to integrate but it can be inferred that Andre accumulated cultural capital in order to understand his new milieu.

Furthermore, he was well equipped to navigate the social and cultural transition to Wellborn. In addition to the capital received as a result of his relationship with Ms. Goodell, Mr. Brinley also assisted in his accumulation of capital.

Andre played basketball in high school and was being recruited by universities. Thus, he had a non-traditional college application process. However, he still had to put forth effort in his Wellborn application:

Interviewer: Did you have anyone help you with the college application process?

Andre: My high school basketball coach I think was pretty instrumental in that. Um but because I was getting recruited for athletics, like it worked a little bit differently where—I only fill—I only filled out one application essentially to [Wellborn]. [...] Um but even so, he helped me through that. Like I couldn't just like B.S. it or anything like that.

Through activating his social capital and seeking help from Mr. Brinley, Andre was able to gain the cultural capital he needed to complete his college application. This support ensured successful placement in college that he may not have been able to attain without the help of an individual with the human capital necessary to assist in the writing of a college admittance essay.

Perhaps even more important to Andre's trajectory than his magnet school teachers, were his elementary school teachers who acted as gatekeepers to the magnet school. Prior to attending the magnet school, Andre went to an underfunded public school in Philadelphia. While resources were scarce, he did have caring teachers who made strides to place him in a school with better opportunities:

Andre: [...] my elementary school teachers—they were very instrumental in... and my counselors—they were very, very instrumental in like pushing me and like you know helping out my family in whatever way they could to you know get me in it and consequently later on my younger brother into the same school.

It is notable that Andre's teachers went to great lengths to help him and his brother transfer to the magnet school. He did not mention if this was a common practice in his public elementary school or if his teachers saw something special in him and his brother that caused them to put forth greater efforts. I was unable to locate discourse that supports a prevalence of teachers and counselors assisting in magnet school transfers<sup>50</sup> and therefore, I find it to be unusual case. However, it is possible that this is a common, yet unstudied, occurrence in inner-city schools. This may be especially true for students who demonstrate promise in their early education.

Andre's social connection to a guidance counselor Ms. Howard, exposed him to cultural capital early in his adolescent educational career. In elementary school Andre took part in a country line dancing group which Ms. Howard organized. The group traveled around the United States including Disney World:

Andre: So she like organized this country line dancing group and I think she just like took a liking to me and like my family and stuff like that and um... I remember her always trying to like expose us to different things. Like she took us to the opera and stuff—but anyways—she was like very instrumental in like getting me into that school (5-12 magnet school).

The effects of cultural participation<sup>51</sup> before the age of 12 have been shown to positively increase the likelihood of having successful educational transitions in the future. Those who participate in cultural activities before the age of 12 are more likely to begin and finish college than those who do not (Ashaffenburg and Maas 1997). Through his travels and participation, Andre gained

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<sup>50</sup> Although not teacher and guidance counselor led, there is emerging discourse on the subject of programs that seek to integrate low-income inter-city students into suburban high-achieving schools (See Ispa-Landa 2013 and Ispa-Landa and Conwell 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Cultural Participation is defined as taking classes in painting, sculpture or dance.

valuable cultural capital. In addition to exposing him to cultural experiences, Ms. Howard also helped Andre to apply to the 5-12 Blue Ribbon magnet school.

Not only did Andre's school have exemplary teachers that bolstered his success, but his magnet school also provided superior resources. Free SAT preparation, before and after school programs, tutoring, athletic programs, and student-to-student mentoring were amongst the many resources the school offered. Andre took advantage of as many resources as possible. He credits his school, teachers, and peers for motivating his involvement in sports, extracurricular clubs, and participation in further education opportunities. Andre speaks highly of the student-to-student mentoring program in which he was both a mentee and mentor:

Interviewer: Why did you decide to apply for it (the mentoring program)?

Andre: Um I remember it being a very positive uh experience in my own life. Like my peer counselor uh who is a cool kid [...] and you know someone who I could talk to who was kind of removed from my life which feels good sometimes too.

Andre's positive experience with the mentoring program led him to apply to become a mentor in the same program. There was a thorough application process which required students to be nominated by peer mentors and teachers. Moreover, students had to complete several weeks of training. The program had a tutoring component in which mentors who received high marks in a course would tutor students who needed additional help in those courses. Additionally, the peer mentors would discuss social issues such as gender, sexuality, and friendship with their mentees. His participation in the program as a mentee allowed him to gain social capital through his relationship with his mentor and cultural capital through the knowledge he gained from those experiences. As a mentor, he accumulated additional forms of social and cultural capital.

The summer before Andre attended Wellborn, he participated in a pre-college program hosted by Wellborn. The program was similar to Wellborn's current WUSAP program. However, the previous program was largely marketed to multicultural student athletes and did not contain many of the successful elements that WUSAP offers today. Similar to his experience with peer mentoring in high school, Andre participated in the pre-college program prior to entering his freshman year and then became a counselor for the program the following year. That is to say that he managed his social and cultural capital from his secondary education experience of peer mentorship. His participation in the program positively impacted his transition to Wellborn:

Interviewer: So you found that program to be a benefit to you?

Andre: Huge, yeah. [...] You got to meet, you know, twenty or thirty other kids that number one, looked like you which changes quickly when you, you know, once everyone comes to campus. Uh number two, it gives you kinda like a friend group cause like that's also just a part of college regardless of who you are, you know, you gotta like go and make friends. [...] So it was great to have that support system.

As a result of his involvement in the program, he gained new sources of social capital through peer networks. Furthermore, by becoming a counselor the following year, he accrued additional sources of social and cultural capital.

In making his decision to attend Wellborn, Andre wanted to be sure that he would be able to benefit from a large alumni network. He was aware of the importance of social connections and in reflected upon his campus visits to Wellborn, he remembered the alumni association as being crucial in his decision to attend stating: "I would always notice [...] the connection that people had. Like I feel like everybody in the world is always doing favors for each other. Like "I'll get you some internship" or "I'll get you some..." you know?" To capitalize on these

opportunities, Andre joined a historically black fraternity. His membership to the fraternity gave him new opportunities to work with university resources and clubs to support the fraternities programs and vice versa. When asked what university resources he used, he mentions some of the physical building were resources are available, but also names the person who helped him:

Andre: I was big in like career services. [...] I worked a lot with [Rachel Newman]. I don't think she's there anymore. She was a black woman and she always like really encouraged and [...] always made herself very known and present to first-generation college students, students of color. Making sure that we knew that she was a resource and so I would go see her. She helped me write my resume and like [gave me a] mock interview, all those kind of things.

Andre saw university resources as more than sources of accumulating cultural capital. They were also sources where social capital could be activated and accumulated.

In addition to strong peer networks and seeking administrative support, Andre also saw the value in having relationships with his professors:

Interviewer: Did you meet with your professors?

Andre: I always thought that was really important. [...] So I always made it a point within the first week or two of class to like introduce myself and then go to an office hours and then from there-- like once you do it once-- you find yourself doing it even more, you know? So um but by initially making that relationship by reaching out most professors will be like "oh" you know "you do care." So then they would even maybe like go the extra step and be like-- ask me "oh, do you have any questions?"

Andre sought to build relationships with his professors as a means of enhancing his performance and to ensure his professors would reach out to him with additional guidance. He recognized that by taking the first step in activating his social capital, his professors would voluntarily advise him in the future.



While Andre had many professors who facilitated his academic and personal growth, one professor in particular stands out:

Andre: I've had probably like hundreds of conversations with Lori that stick out in my mind for various reasons. [...] what she studied, her life's work, was so intertwined in what... the way in which I was thinking and the things you start to pick up on and notice [...] you're at like Wellborn and you're from a place like Philly or from like a working class or a poor family... just not having all the things all the time and everyone else around you has all the things all the time and like it seems like normal. Like it becomes the new normal and you feel like there's something wrong with you. [...] It was kind of like an ongoing discussion for a lifetime, essentially, that her and I would have.

Like his 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Ms. Goodell, Lori was available when Andre was experiencing adversity. Lori, an Africana studies professor, focuses her research on race, religion, and social class in America. Having experienced both race and social class issues, Andre gravitated to Lori who was more than willing to have those conversations. He remains in contact with her and visits her whenever he returns to Wellborn.

Andre began his educational journey in an underfunded Philadelphia elementary school but through numerous interventions, he has received both his bachelor's and master's degree from one of the highest ranked universities in the nation. His ability to activate, accumulate, and manage his sources of social capital has positioned him in the upper-middle class. Along his trajectory and through activating the social capital associated with his mentoring and peer networks, he has accumulated new forms of cultural capital that influenced his integration into each new social sphere.

*Jordan*

Although he graduated in 2005, Jordan has chosen to remain in the Wellborn University town with his wife, daughter, and newborn son. Jordan and I agreed to meet at a restaurant just a few miles from Wellborn University. When he arrived he was taking a call from his wife. He politely shook my hand and introduced himself but returned his attention to his wife. While I waited for him to finish his call, I took note of his neatly pressed button down shirt and slacks, his confident stance, and congenial tone with his wife. He ended the call with his wife and we sat at a booth in a dark aisle of the restaurant. He explained that he needed to console his wife over her frustrations with her nursing son who was not latching. We flipped through the menu, making small talk. When the waitress arrived to take our order he placed an order for his dinner and a meal to go for his wife.

Jordan had the outward appearance and mannerisms contingent with the upper class. He sat up straight with his shoulders back, accentuating his bulky athletic figure while carefully chewing his food before responding to my questions. Upon meeting him you would not guess that he primarily grew up in a low-income single parent home. His parents divorced at a young age and at that time, Jordan moved from the southern United States to New York. Seeking support from positive male role-models, Jordan looked to his teachers and coaches:

Interviewer: Did you use any school resources?

Jordan: I think, I think at that age for me, because my parents split and I didn't really have a father figure—I probably gravitated more towards male—male support systems like my coach or like the male science teacher. Like really looked towards them for direction, you know? And I still have strong relationships with those people too.

Like Andre, when asked about resources, Jordan describes people rather than the totality of resources. Furthermore, just like Andre, his teachers were important because of the emotional support they provided and he has remained in contact with them. In other words, he has managed

his social capital from those relationships. To Jordan, having an adult support system through difficult life situations was important:

Interviewer: Can you talk a bit about your science teacher and the impact he has had on you?

Jordan: You know, if I was struggling with my mom and dad's separation or my... their divorce. Um you know, he just would say you know "Hey Jordan, what's going on?" He knew... he could see something was bothering me. So it was easy to open up to him versus um you know instead of just keeping it inside. You know so having him there to talk to helped me get through.

In Jordan's case, social support from teachers has helped in overcoming the struggles of coping with his parent's divorce. Moreover, his science teacher reached out to him, taking some of the social pressure of activating his social capital off of him. However, Jordan did activate his social capital as a mechanism of accumulating cultural capital:

Jordan: I knew fairly quickly that I wanted to go... I wanted to try to pursue to be a guidance counselor so I would go to my guidance counselor quite a bit.

In order to gain the knowledge necessary to pursue his educational and career goals, Jordan sought help from someone in his intended field. Although Jordan later chose a different path, seeking advice from his guidance counselor gave him cultural capital to make an informed decision on whether or not to continue pursuing a career as a college counselor.

In addition to these mentors, Jordan looked up to his coach and health teacher as a positive male role model:

Interviewer: You mentioned your health teacher, what was your relationship like with your health teacher?

Jordan: Well he was my football coach too. [...] I looked up to [him] as a father figure as well. Um and he um I respected him most out of anybody um I don't know what else to say. I, I just looked up to him because I saw that he you know went from being you

know um low income family going to college, you know being a successful high school coach, you know. Um being a teacher, now he's gone from being the health teacher, to the vice-principal, to a principal. So I really looked up to him.

Jordan still remains in contact with him as well as some of the professors who had a positive impact on him in college. Throughout college, Jordan developed many friendly relationships with his professors, often speaking to them outside of class. He did not attend office hours or email his professors often but he did speak with them in passing. These casual discussions with professors before or after class led to some of them becoming lifelong acquaintances. He still stops to chat with his college professors when he sees them at Wellborn events such as football games and when he sees them around town.

### *Keith*

Keith learned from an early age that the more he excelled in anything he did, the more affirmation he would receive. Through participating in sports and theater early in his adolescence, he found that the adults in his life were eager to support him. Clinging onto this feeling, Keith sought out every opportunity to serve his community, grow as a leader, and make academic strides. Along his path to college, Keith stayed motivated through the mentorship of his parents, grandfather, karate coach, and teachers.

Throughout the interview process for this study, several interviewees discussed the positive role their parents had on them. Many students also expressed discontent with their parents. By and large, the students in this study conveyed an appreciation for their parents but dissatisfaction in the level of mentorship they were able to provide. This was not the case for

Keith. Keith's parents played an active role in his education and extracurricular activities. They supported him in everything he did and pushed him to succeed. His parents were his biggest cheerleaders.

Along with his parents, Keith's grandfather served as a mentor. Although his grandfather did not go to college, he is a decorated military veteran and taught Keith the value of hard work.

Furthermore, Keith looked up to him for his interpersonal skills:

Keith: He always had those soft skills, he always, I don't know, he just sort of provided, it wasn't necessarily that he would need to put it in words what he did but he would show me. Like I saw the way he interacted with people. And I was like "yeah!"-- like I could put myself in his shoes when I needed to. If I needed to go be a professional with people, I could be like "whelp, I need to be my grandfather for a little bit." And he had a really big impact on me in that way.

Seeing his grandfather as a role model, Keith activated the social capital bestowed upon him from his grandfather to help him manage his interactions. It gave him the confidence to interact with people. Additionally, Keith desired to make his grandfather proud and that further motivated him to do well in whatever goals he was working towards.

As a child, Keith developed a close bond with his karate teacher. Their bond helped Keith to outperform the other students in the class:

Keith: He always expressed how impressed he was by me which felt awesome because he was great at what he did. He was like a person in his leadership role. He was definitely like in charge around there but he was like impressed by me, who I know was like way below him, and it felt really good that like wow somebody who has seen the ropes, sees something in me.

Always one to gravitate towards those who admired him, Keith excelled because his karate instructor expressed how impressed he was with Keith. This support also gave Keith the self-

confidence to form relationships with other adults in leadership roles. They remain in contact today. Thus, Keith has managed his social capital with his mentor.

Finally, while in high school, Keith was drawn to his biology teacher. She was a no nonsense teacher who valued students who worked hard and for those students, she expressed her gratitude. At times, Keith felt like he was working hard on his studies but teachers weren't noticing. However, his biology teacher did take notice. She commended him for gaining her respect rather than demanding it. From this, he realized that it was rewarding to put in the extra effort and continued to do so in hopes that someone would notice.

Keith has continued to make valuable social connections in college. He found a professor who was also a first-generation college student and he gravitated to him for mentorship. Initially upon attending Wellborn he felt as though he was one of the few students who matriculated on his own merit. He was unsure of if he could truly be successful when he was surrounded by so many students with far greater family resources than him. Through his professor's example, he is no confident that he can realize his dreams. They frequently meet for lunch and have lengthy discussions. He does not regularly attend office hours but he does reach out to make informal plans with his professors. Furthermore, he talks to his professors at the end of almost every class.

### *Marshall*

Growing up in a working class neighborhood of Philadelphia, Marshall became aware of the shortcomings of the Philadelphia public school system. He attended three charter schools: two for middle school and one for high school. In order to attend a charter school that fell outside of his school district, he applied with his grandmother's address. This is a common trend

amongst families living in poor performing school districts (Johnson 2014). In addition to the charter schools he attended, he also attended a private Catholic school. However, his parent's had to work additional hours to afford the school, leading to the decision of switching to a charter school.

Attending charter schools proved to be an avenue for successful college matriculation. Throughout his adolescent educational career he had several mentors who influenced his decision to attend Wellborn University. Amongst his mentors were his cousin, teachers, and a high school guidance counselor. His cousin Corey who attended a selective private university, mentored Marshall throughout the application process. Corey was raised in a similar environment as Marshall and shared his experience as well as prepared Marshall for what to expect. Furthermore, Marshall gained moral support from his relationship with Corey.

In addition to Corey, Marshall also had the help of his guidance counselor who provided access to Wellborn:

Interviewer: What school resources did you use?

Marshall: [...] I used my school counselor. Like um she, she really helped me. I can't explain everything she did cause she did so much. Like um she brought in a lot of um representatives from different colleges to talk to them and the first representative was um [Alice Yolen] from [Wellborn].

Like much of the other interviewees with aggregate mentors, Marshall's first inclination when asked about school resources was to discuss the people who have helped him. Representing Wellborn, Alice Yolen spoke to students about the university and the opportunity to attend a weekend visit. Underrepresented prospective students could apply to a program in which they were given the opportunity to live in dorms, learn about support services, interact with current

students, and attend a financial aid informational. Both Marshall and his brother applied and were accepted to the program. After attending the event they quickly decided that they wanted to continue in the application process to attend the following fall.

Throughout high school, Marshall had numerous teachers who impacted him and his trajectory. One such teacher was Mr. Tome, his high school English teacher:

Marshall: He was really, really cool and like um I could go and talk to him about things and he would help me with my papers and everything. [...] He went to a selective school and [...] he knew about [Wellborn] and he knew that it had a good reputation.

In addition to being one of the teachers who discussed Wellborn with Marshall, Mr. Tome also taught social issues in his class. Drawn to social issues, Marshall is now in a pre-law program with two minors and a major in the social sciences. The participants in this study were often drawn to mentors who had college experience, specifically those who attended selective colleges, and those that they could personally identify with. Marshall's conversations with Mr. Tome went beyond advice for applying, they also discussed how to navigate social life:

Marshall: [...] we were talking about how in college you're going to meet like a lot of um friends but a lot of people you'll just say hi to in class or yeah you'll make a lot of easy connections. But he said like don't try to hold onto all your easy connections, like try to have a core group of friends. So like I guess it's like quality over quantity. So I guess I'm learning to do that. Like I, I talk to people but I still have my core group.

With this advice, Marshall was given a tool kit for social interactions in college. He understands the importance of social networking but also understands the value of friendship.

Since entering college, Marshall has looked towards mentors who can provide the same level of support. The director, as well as a peer counselor of WUSAP have provided that support:



Marshall: If I have a problem, I can just go to them and they're very understanding. And they make themselves very available for students to talk to.

Students in this study have consistently noted the importance of availability when seeking support. Students need more than just academic support, they also need emotional and social support. WUSAP provides students with holistic mentoring to aid in their college integration process such as providing them with a network of peers, teaching them the functions of a college classroom, and how to interact with professors.

Although he is a freshman and was interviewed only a couple of months into his first semester at Wellborn, Marshall had already begun forming relationships with his professors. Two of his professors have required that all students meet with them to discuss their papers. This has been helpful in bridging the gap between professor and student. Marshall felt that these required conferences boosted his academic performance and gave him the opportunity to get acquainted with his professors. Additionally, it gave him the confidence to reach out to his professors when he needed help or something was unclear:

Interviewer: Do you email your professors?

Marshall: Yes.

Interviewer: For what reason?

Marshall: For um-- for my English my English um conference I forgot my time so I emailed her and she ended up uploading the schedule to blackboard. And then um she said when we turned in our first paper, wanted are um, like we had students read our drafts and they had to do like a peer review. So she said she wanted our peer review sheets but I had lost mine. So I had emailed her the morning of the paper and I was like "I did my paper and I printed it out and everything but I lost one of my peer review sheets." And she was like "oh, it's okay."

By giving students an avenue to become acquainted with professors, Marshall was equipped to seek additional help from his professors. Even though Marshall has made efforts to talk to his professors, he admits that he feels this comes easier to continuing-generation college students:

Interviewer: What do you wish professors understood about first-generation college students?

Marshall: I guess that we, we really don't have anyone coaching us. Like some people like I know their parents went to college—their brother went to college—so they kinda sorta know what to expect. With me, even though I talk to some of my teachers, like it's a whole different experience. And everyone's experience is different but like, I guess like, other people they kinda sorta knew what to um be prepared for, and I wasn't prepared. Well, I, I did [WUSAP] so I met some people and made some good connections but I wasn't as prepared as some people.

Even though WUSAP gave Marshall the extra leverage he needed, he still felt unprepared for social interactions in college. While making connections in college is important, he also noted the importance of prior connections: “Like I've met people and made connections and stuff but I don't it's just like people—they were like really—really integrated before they came.” Approximately 15% of Wellborn University's student body is legacy students, or students who have at least one parent who is a Wellborn alum<sup>52</sup>. A smaller percentage, approximately 10% of students, are first-generation<sup>53</sup>.

### *Eve*

Like many participants in this study, Eve attended a charter school for part of her adolescence but graduated from a public high school. A highly motivated student, Eve participated in multiple clubs and graduated valedictorian with the help of her aggregate mentors.

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<sup>52</sup> Wellborn University website

<sup>53</sup> [www.imfirst.org](http://www.imfirst.org)

Amongst her mentors were her friend from a nearby school, teachers, a cousin, and her high school guidance counselor. Eve had the same guidance counselor for all four years of high school and began meeting with her regularly during her sophomore year. Her guidance counselor has presented her with numerous opportunities and Eve remains in contact with her:

Interviewer: Can you take about what your relationship was like with your guidance counselor?

Eve: She, she always like emailed us about like scholarship opportunities and like different like extracurricular things we could participate in. Um when I was a junior she introduced me to this, this Rutgers program. This Rutgers pre-college program—two of them—so I did both of them. [...] I still like talk to her.

Their consistent contact resulted in Eve participating in two pre-college programs, attending college visits, and going to college fairs at other high schools amongst other forms of college preparation aid. One of the pre-college programs she attended was a four day event held at Yale University. During her stay, she was given instructions on how to write a personal statement, form networks, and choose safety and reach schools.

Eve's guidance counselor also arranged for representatives from various college scholarship programs to speak to students. One such organization offered full tuition scholarships for a number of selective colleges if the students were accepted to the program as well as the college they had chosen. For this particular program, students applied to the scholarship program and if accepted to the program, were able to choose from a list of participating colleges. If a student was accepted to one of the colleges on their list, they were contracted to attend that school. If they were accepted to more than one university, the scholarship program matched them with a university and they were required to attend. Eve did

not want to be locked into a contract so she only listed one university, Vanderbilt. She was not accepted.

The high school set monthly meetings for students to visit with their guidance counselor but students had the option of setting additional meetings. During her senior year, Eve frequented the guidance counselor's office seeking additional resources. Eve formed a close bond with her guidance counselor who arranged for her to return to high school over her college winter break to speak with students about college. Much like Andre and his role as protégé turned mentor, Eve was also given an opportunity to mentor students.

In addition to utilizing the resources given to her by her guidance counselor, Eve also researched colleges online. To help her with navigating online resources, Eve sought help from a friend who was part of college preparation program that Eve did not take part in:

Interviewer: So was this a lot of internet research?

Eve: Um yeah definitely everything was internet, yeah. Um my friend, she, like she did [...] a college preparation program that she was in since her freshman year so like she kind of like aided me with the um, with the college application process because she was a part of that program and because like she had like, like official people to like help her navigate the entire process. So like she helped me and I also helped her in a way because like it was just so easy for me to do it on my own.

Eve activated her social capital and gained knowledge of the resources her friend had been given. Help came in the form of shared information about which programs gave more financial assistance and how to navigate online college resources.

In addition to her guidance counselor and friend, Eve had two teachers who motivated her to succeed. She remains in contact with one of the teachers and holds onto the contact information of the other. Her English teacher Mr. Jenkins had an off the cusp way of teaching,

often straying from the confines of the established curriculum. Eve appreciated his approach especially in comparison to other teachers who made it obvious that course work was assigned in preparation for standardized tests. While applying to schools, she discussed her college plans including her intended major with Mr. Jenkins.

Seeing Eve as a strong student in his English course, Mr. Jenkins urged Eve to consider a degree in the humanities. She considered but is now majoring in economics with a minor in business and considering an additional minor in Africana studies. After taking an economics course in high school, she felt as though pursuing a degree in economics would best suit her interests and eventual career goals. While it may not be exactly what Mr. Jenkins recommended, a minor in Africana studies would give Eve a comprehensive education where she can utilize writing, reading, and critical thinking skills.

In addition to Mr. Jenkins, Eve also formed a close bond to her AP history teacher, Mr. Phillips. Unlike Eve, Mr. Phillips was not raised in a low income, predominately black town. Eve enjoyed hearing his perspectives on life as they varied greatly from her other teachers, many of which were raised in environments similar to that of Eve's. She also enjoyed the opportunity to hear perspectives from a white authority figure, given that most of her teachers and the adults in her life were black:

Eve: [...] Like there just wasn't that many white teachers at my school. Um he was younger, he was really young and um he was just really... he just like relayed everything in like the simplest terms so that's what made everything like stick with me um and he just gave me like a lot of real life advice I guess and like coming from his perspective since he grew up in like a different environment. [...] It stuck with me just because I was always interested in to hear about how other people live and like cause I know what I'm used to so like to hear advice from somebody else, it just stuck with me.

Eve, like many of the other participants in this study, valued the relatability of their teachers. Interestingly, many of the students gravitated towards teachers whose subject of teaching differed from the student's subject of study in college. Furthermore, being close in age to their teachers helped them to form a bond. While applying to colleges, Mr. Phillips reviewed her essays and recommended colleges. Eve remains in contact with Mr. Phillips, texting him at academic milestones:

Interviewer: Can you talk about the relationship you have with him?

Eve: Mm I just text him like whenever I do something good here and I just show him and he like—like anything I got going on good here—I just like let him know about that. I'll just text him and he'll just you know like [say] congrats or whatever but yeah he's cool.

Eve's close relationship with Mr. Phillips gives her an adult to share in her accomplishments. By managing her social capital, Eve has the potential to accumulate further social capital from her relationship with her mentor in the future. This may open an avenue to additional opportunities, whether it be social, academic, or career opportunities. Additionally, although she has not managed her social capital with her mentor Mr. Jenkins as of the time of our interview, she can still activate capital from that connection in the future.

These connections to teachers in high school likely helped Eve in her transition to college and building relationships with her professors. Eve was interviewed in her second semester of her freshman year. By that time she had already attended office hours, talked with faculty outside of class, and emailed her professors. This demonstrates Eve's ability to activate social capital given her prior experience interacting with educators.

Since graduating high school Eve has had the opportunity to be mentored by her cousin who graduated from an Ivy League university:

Interviewer: Can you talk about that? How he's helped you?

Eve: So he, he um he works for like a firm now so it's just a coincidence that we're both interested in business. So he, he basically like makes sure that like I'm making the most out of like my business career here. Um so like he basically like always tries to connect me with people that he know[s]. Like um not people that really he work[s] with but people that he knows from like [the Ivy League university]. [...] If I ever need any help like financially he helps me and he like just gives me advice and stuff like that.

At one point, Eve considered transferring to the Ivy League university her cousin attended due to the social atmosphere at Wellborn. Wellborn is known amongst students to be socially divided and “cliquey.” While considering a transfer, Eve’s cousin put her contact with several people at his alma mater. Inevitably, Eve decided to remain at Wellborn. However, through that process, she has gained new contacts that may be able to help her later when she pursues a career.

In addition to providing Eve with new contacts for the future, Eve’s cousin has been a valuable asset to her aggregate mentoring community. With his experience, he can direct her to resources, help her with classes, pass on information about academic and career opportunities, and inevitably, help her in the job market. These resources, as well as the financial help he is able to provide, will undoubtedly propel Eve for success.

Despite having aggregate mentors, Eve repeatedly mentioned feeling handicapped in the college setting:

Interviewer: Can you describe a way that you feel handicapped?

Eve: Um like, like I just feel like I wish I had like a stronger background of like my major. Um and um a stronger background in like what to expect from college and stuff like that.

Like other first-generation college students in this study, Eve felt unprepared for college. Prior to entering college, she took one high school course in economics that influenced her major.

Choosing a major based on one high school course has been found to be common amongst first-generation college students attending community colleges (Rosenbaum 2007). Furthermore, first-generation college students enrolled in community colleges were also unaware of how to navigate college, often taking remedial courses and having more credits than necessary in classes that were not pertinent to their degree. This may be a trend that extends to selective universities as well.

### *Wynn*

Wynn, a first-generation college student and first-generation immigrant hails from a socioeconomic background that greatly varies from the other students in this study. His parents are both college educated, but from South Korea. His father has a law degree and his mother has the bachelor's degree equivalent. Moreover, for most of his adolescence, Wynn was comfortably situated in the middle class. However, his parent's financial situation changed while he was in high school and is now expected to help support his parents post-college.

Wynn attended a high performing magnet school from elementary to high school. While at that school he grew close to multiple teachers who mentored him throughout the college application process. Exceedingly involved in his education, his parents established relationships with the teachers. Furthermore, his parents knew many of the students' parents which generated opportunities for Wynn and their older son who also attended the magnet school. Because students attended the same school from elementary to high school, the teachers were well-



established and vested in their students. Wynn recalls the personal attention his teachers provided:

Wynn: My teacher just called my house and like asked me how I was doing. And that to me was extremely new and like that's not, that wasn't like something that happened all the time in my like elementary school career but like I would say that that's something that was like very definitive or characteristic of like my teacher's involvements.

Wynn appreciated teachers who held a personal investment in him. He clung to these teachers throughout his adolescent education, even growing close to a teacher who taught a subject he disliked because he identified with him on a personal level.

In high school, Wynn developed a close bond with his chemistry teacher, Mr. Lewis, who he admired for his convivial traits. Even though he did not like chemistry, Wynn became a teaching assistant for his course. Throughout his time spent as a student and teaching assistant to Mr. Lewis, Mr. Lewis helped him as he navigated the social structure within his school. Many of the students who attended Wynn's magnet school continued to Ivy League schools. While Wellborn University is not an Ivy, it is a highly ranked and well regarded school. Wynn's chemistry teacher reassured him that he did not need to go to an Ivy to be successful and encouraged him to pursue his passions:

Wynn: And he just really told me it's really important to like figure out what you love doing and that's why he loved his job so much. [...] That just like definitely helped a lot in terms of my approach because like, I just didn't know what to do. Like I didn't know what I wanted to do.

This advice was important to Wynn because it encouraged him to realize his full potential and to not be discouraged by the hyper-competitive nature of his school. With so many of his peers being accepted to Ivy League schools, he needed to know that there were other universities that provide excellent educations.

In addition to Mr. Lewis, Wynn connected with his economics teacher, global studies teacher, and high school guidance counselor. His relationship with his economics teacher was primarily academic. Although his relationship with her was largely impersonal, he did frequent her office to discuss his studies. Moreover, she was one of the teachers who wrote a letter of recommendation to attend college on his behalf. He had a more personal relationship with his global studies teacher, who he enjoyed joking around with. Delivering holistic mentorship, she advised him in both academics and life. Throughout his college years, Wynn has maintained relationships with some of his teachers but not all of him.

Wynn's guidance counselor was a huge asset to him and was the one who suggested he apply to Wellborn:

Interviewer: And how did you benefit from working with your guidance counselor?

Wynn: Basically everyone is applying to Ivy's. It's hyper-competitive and I wasn't the best student in my school so it was even more like difficult in a lot of ways because like I couldn't just apply to like Ivy Leagues [...] And so for me I really relied on um my guidance counselor for like what other schools should I be applying to cause like you know you get a huge book of like the colleges and their profiles and you just, you just don't know those statistics are like very vague. Um and so what she was able to do was like link, like tell me about programs that like would fit my interests and that like [Wynn's magnet school] students have gone to or applied to or have explored or like we have a relationship with them.

Due to his relationship with his guidance counselor, Wynn was connected to alumni from his high school that were current Wellborn students. Wynn then reached out to those students and from there, made the decision to apply and inevitably, attend. Additionally, Wynn's guidance counselor helped him to secure financial aid, something none of the other students in this study had help with through a guidance counselor.

Wynn has thrived throughout college. He has continued to make close personal connections with his professors and by activating his social capital, he has accumulated both social and cultural capital. Through one of his favorite professors Linda, he was introduced to a prestigious scholarship program for which he was accepted. He has maintained a high GPA, taken part in academic clubs, and discovered his passion for journalism. Once he discovered his true passion, he began building his resume in journalism. He now has extensive experience for being a senior in college and from this cultural capital accumulation, he is being propelled into his future career.

### *Summary*

Students with aggregate mentoring relationships while in high school were able to continue developing relationships with various adults who served as mentors in college. These students were adept to activating their social capital which often times transferred to social capital. Additionally, these students are skillful in accumulating and managing their social and cultural capital. Most importantly, these students were the happiest with their college experiences and expressed confidence in approaching academics.

### ASSIGNED MENTORS

Students with guardian and aggregate mentors chose their mentors. They found an adult with whom they connected with and build a relationship. Conversely, those with assigned mentors did not choose their mentors and were rather given them by an institution. In this study, two students, Paige and Bailey were assigned mentors through a pre-college program and one student, Donna was assigned a guidance counselor who served as her mentor.

### *Paige*

Paige grew up in a primarily single parent home in the suburbs. Her parents divorced when she was six years old and has been distant with her father ever since. Paige and her two siblings would see their father sporadically throughout the year and during most holidays. In recent years she has barely seen or spoken to him. Although Paige's had a single working mother, she saw her often and developed a strong bond. Although she worked a lot of hours, her mother worked from home throughout most of Paige's adolescence. Her mother helped her as much as she could with college but the primary form of help came from Paige's involvement in a pre-college program.

In middle school, Paige was involved in a program for advanced students. Within that program she had a counselor who told Paige's mother about the Oscar Kirk Foundation<sup>54</sup>, a scholarship and pre-college program. Together, Paige and her mother applied to the foundation through a lengthy application process that involved writing multiple essays. She was accepted to the foundation in eighth grade. Paige describes the comprehensive program:

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<sup>54</sup> Note: name of program changed.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that (the Oscar Kirk Foundation)?

Paige: Like I had um an educational advisor who I would talk to once a month and kind of make like, work through goal setting and like figure out like what I wanted to do for like this year. [...] For me it was—I played the violin and I played soccer—it was a lot of extracurricular involvement and stuff but also books and like they bought me a laptop, things like that. And so depending on my goals they would like allocate funds in those areas to help me be able to participate and like not have to worry about the financial like resources. Um but yeah there was also a lot of college planning and advising and they would, they funded like a few college visits. So I was able to like come up to Wellborn and like check it out and so like that was very helpful. And I know that's like not a very common experience for first-generation students.

Unlike most scholarship programs, the Oscar Kirk Foundation funded resources for success in high school as well. Through her meetings with her advisor, Paige would work through goal setting that would influence not only her success in high school, but also her future success in college. Without these resources, Paige may not have been able to participate in extracurricular activities, purchase books, or have a personal laptop.

In addition to the extracurricular activities Paige was able to participate in, she also went on several college visits. The physical place and “campus feel” were both important to her in making her decision. She wanted to be sure that she could see herself on the campus before applying. College visits were done as a family:

Paige: [...] my mom is like really big on visiting colleges. Like every time any of us have visiting a college like we all go together just so we can all see a new place.

This support from her mother and siblings was important in both her trajectory and the trajectory of her siblings. Her two brothers are currently attended colleges, one of which is attended an elite school, and her sister is applying to colleges.

College tours weren't the only opportunity Paige had to get the “feel” for a campus. She attended a summer camp at a university every summer from the summer before 10<sup>th</sup> grade to the

summer before her senior year of high school. Each three week long camp was fully funded by the Oscar Kirk Foundation. The first camp she attended was at Yale University for their EXPLO camp. At the time, Paige was unsure of her academic interests so her advisor suggested EXPLO for its range of courses and activities. She took mostly art classes such as painting and mosaics but found the real strength to be the experience:

Paige: The cool part was just for one being at Yale was really cool cause that was just like my first exposure to like other college options like here's a college and I'm living there and like this is possible.

Experiencing a college setting for the first time solidified for her that she could go to college. It was first time away from home and she was able to see herself there and was comfortable being away from her family.

Her time away at summer camps also gave Paige exposure to new cultures and students who, like her, valued academics. This exposure expanded her worldview:

Paige: Also there were a lot of international students who came into the program which is exciting because I met, a lot of my friends I made were from China, and like that was so cool to me cause I didn't know that like people did that or like came to camp or like came from the other side of the world to camp.

Paige developed an interest in other cultures and particularly enjoyed learning new languages.

One of the camps she attended was a Spanish immersion camp in California. Paige fondly remembers this being the first time she took a plane and the only time she traveled to the western United States, an opportunity she wouldn't have had, had it not been for the Oscar Kirk Foundation. She also attended a camp for marine biology where she worked scientists in the field. This was particularly influential:

Paige: For me that was really encouraging to live with people who really loved science and like just did it all the time, every day and like oh wow, I could do this, like I could be a scientist and enjoy it all the time.

Paige now studies molecular biology at Wellborn University. Her passion was influenced by exposure in camps and also through a high school course.

Paige did not have any mentors that really stood out to her as having an impact on her college decisions. However, Ms. Meredith, Paige's high school science fair coordinator and biology teacher, influenced Paige's decision to major in molecular biology. Paige is not in regular contact with Ms. Meredith but she has contacted her on a previous occasion for a letter of recommendation. In this sense, she has managed the social capital from this relationship but she does not make continuous efforts to maintain the relationship. This has been a common occurrence with Paige and her mentoring relationships.

The Oscar Kirk Foundation has provided Paige with two primary advisors who have helped her with her making the most of her high school experience and applying to college. Despite numerous meetings and continuous contact with these advisors, Paige stopped reaching out to them once she began college. Paige remains in contact with the foundation, which pays for Paige's full tuition and a small yearly stipend. She mentions that if she is ever in need of support from the foundation, she has contact information to receive that support. However, she has yet to contact her previous advisors and does not see a reason to reach out to them.

This trend has continued in college where Paige finds it difficult to connect with her professors. She has attended some office hours but, by and large, has not been effective in making connections:

Interviewer: Do you meet with your professors outside of class?

Paige: Not really. Like I try to but it's, that's something that actually also has been really hard for me. Like I feel like I should and I have been told that I should go to office hours

and ask for help and that they'll be willing to help me but I don't do it well. Like I've gone to office hours a few times but like I just don't, I always feel like I'm wasting their time and I feel like my questions aren't important enough and yeah so I just end up not going and most of my professors I don't connect with. That's something that's really hard for me also cause like thinking about potentially grad school and like letters of recommendation. Like I just don't connect with professors and I don't know how to put in the effort to do that without being like really fake about it.

Paige realizes the importance of making connections, especially when it comes to her future academic pursuits. Despite this, she worries that she will appear inauthentic when seeking helping or building a network. In the past, those who have mentored Paige have been assigned to her. Her advisors through the Oscar Kirk Foundation were not chosen by her and were a condition of membership to the foundation. Additionally, her favorite teacher Ms. Meredith, became a contact because Paige participating in the science fair.

Paige has consistently struggled with activating her social capital and further, maintaining the connections she has. She maintains that she has a desire to make connections but does not know how to secure social capital. She has reached out to her connections for letters of recommendations but fears that her efforts to personally identify with her professors will not be enough for strong recommendations. Despite her social capital shortcomings, Paige is progressing in academia and has not had any major academic setbacks.

### *Bailey*

Bailey is a first-generation college student and first-generation immigrant from South America. She grew up in a low-income suburban town in the western United States. Her local schools were known to be dangerous and knowing this, her parents enrolled her in private school for elementary and middle school. Having come from a low income public elementary school,



Bailey was shocked to discover her own socioeconomic standing upon attending a private school.

Attending a private school was Bailey's first glimpse into the spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. She found it difficult to integrate due to her lack of resources. Many of her peers were wealthy and associating with them was difficult especially when it came to working on group projects. She would never volunteer her home because she was afraid of what her peers would think. As much as she was shocked by their lavish living conditions, she believed they would be similarly stunned by hers. However, she knew that she could not return to her local school and receive the same level of education. For high school, she decided to apply to a magnet program and was accepted.

Her magnet school provided a vigorous curriculum and she was with students who came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. From her classmates she learned of a program meant for low-income minority students to help them succeed in high school and prepare them for college known as Students Achieving Academic Success<sup>55</sup> or SAAS:

Interviewer: How did you know to apply to that program?

Bailey: Well um a couple of my classmates, they were in it, and as a freshman they told me about it and so I went but at the time it was all full. Um but then sophomore year I got a call from them and they were interested in me so I applied and got it. It was also through an application and an interview process but it was because of some of the classmates.

From her relationships with her peers, Bailey was able to attend the program that propelled her into the college application process. The program provided academic support, sent students on college visits, allowed them to attend camps, and helped with the college application process.

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<sup>55</sup> Note: The name of the program has been changed.

For this program, Bailey was not assigned a specific advisor to help her through the program but she had several teachers who helped her throughout the program. While she enjoyed working with these teachers, she did not develop sustaining relationships with any of them. However, she did place a high value on the program, especially in relation to how it made up for high school's shortcomings:

Interviewer: How did your high school prepare you for the college application process?

Bailey: Actually to be quite frankly honest with you, they didn't really, they didn't really have a course or anything that you know told you want to do and stuff like that... the deadlines... nothing. They just didn't. If it wasn't for SAAS I wouldn't have you know, progressed as well through that process.

The program was what really positioned her to successfully matriculate to Wellborn. However, just like Paige, Bailey did not develop a close relationship to any of her assigned mentors and has not activated, accumulated, or managed the social capital from those relationships.

Bailey is currently in her senior year of college and although she has made good academic progress, she has not formed many relationships that allow for social capital activation. She has formed a relationship with her biology professor and continues to stay in contact with her. She emails her regularly and visits her on occasion. Overall, she has struggled with social and cultural capital activation while trying to navigate college:

Bailey: I wish that they (the administration) understood that it's not easy and I wish that they had supplementary programs designed specifically for first generation students to guide first-generation students because yes I got the guide I needed in high school to go into college but what happens when you get into college. [...] Once you're in college, what happens there? What happens to the first-generation students? Again this whole thing is new. I just wish that they continued guiding us you know. Specifically tailoring the needs of the first-generation students and the first-generation body. Um because we're still learning and a lot of us are floundering in our classes trying to understand things. How do things work? How should we study? How should we confront a professor? How should we go about internships? What are internships?

Despite having no major academic setbacks, Bailey has found it difficult to navigate the Wellborn social sphere. She is hopeful that new programs will be implemented to support and guide first-generation college students throughout their time at university.

### *Donna*

Donna spent her early childhood in her grandparent's custody and then returned to her parents at the age of five. Growing up, she found it difficult to become close with her parents and the strain with her parents continues to this day. Her parents did not serve as strong role models and unfortunately, there were not many other adults that she looked up to. Her primary source of help came from her high school guidance counselor:

Interviewer: How did your school prepare you for the college application process?

Donna: I remember they called us to like an auditorium where like everyone in the, in the junior class I think— yeah— everyone in the junior class had to listen to like this lecture that our guidance counselor gave and she basically just went through everything that was in the pamphlet that she handed out and um the pamphlet was pretty self- explanatory but it didn't really tell us like where, where to like apply for scholarships or anything to like enhance the college application process like after, after you do get into a college.

In addition to the lecture given by the guidance counselor, Donna met with her guidance counselor for help with the college application process as often as once a week.

Donna's guidance counselor provided support for the applications and also made herself available for emotional support:

Interviewer: Did you have meetings with the guidance counselor?

Donna: Yes I had often meeting with her and a lot of the times it was just-- it was just like I felt like talking to her so I would just come down and talk to her. Um so like I would say on like a very personal level, I connected with her.

When Donna was stressed, she would speak with her guidance counselor and her guidance counselor would give her advice. Despite growing close to her in high school, Donna has not remained in contact with her guidance counselor.

Donna is currently a freshman at Wellborn and has not yet found her footing. She has yet to make connections with her professors and find a social group. Donna lacks the skills to activate her social capital and cultural capital. Without these resources, she may find it difficult to progress in college. However, she is still in her first year of college and has three more years to learn how to build connections with her peers and faculty.

### *Summary*

Students with assigned mentors varied in their ability to activate, accumulate, and manage social capital. However, all students with assigned mentors did not manage their social capital from pre-college mentoring relationships. This may be because they did not choose their mentors and therefore, were not able to build lasting relationships with them. Donna being a first-year student had not activated sources of social capital at the time of our interview. She may learn to do this later as she learns to navigate college. Paige and Bailey activated their social capital but struggled in accumulation and management. Furthermore, they were not adept to transferring social capital into cultural capital.

### GRIT

Some students in this study didn't have any notable mentorship from adults. These student have been included in this section and termed "grit." These students matriculated at Wellborn University largely due to their own personal integrity.

*Lucas*

Lucas' family emigrated from the Caribbean to a large metropolitan city where they raised their two sons. Wanting the best education for their sons, they chose to send them to private Catholic schools for the entirety of their adolescent academic careers. Not having any strong mentors, Lucas credits his parents' ideology with his successes:

Interviewer: Is there anyone that served as a mentor to you?

Lucas: We had like that one cousin who like everybody kind of talks—has to talk to before they go to college. [...] He was born in Haiti, came to the U.S. in like junior high/high school, and then went to community college and then went to [Ivy League university] and then went to med school. [...] He talked to me a little bit about college and kind of like told me about what fields would be good to pursue. Um but at the same, you know, that was about the extent of the mentorship. I don't know, I didn't really have any mentors in that like traditional definition of the word growing up. It was more so my parents example of like working hard. Um so that was like the kind of mentorship that I have. Other than that I can't really point to like any one person who kind of guided me.

The amount of mentorship Lucas received was negligible in comparison to this study's participants with guardian and aggregate mentors. Aside from conversations with his cousin, Lucas didn't receive any mentorship while applying to college.

Lucas applied to college using internet resources rather than his social connections.

Without much direction, Lucas based his school decisions off of a website:

Interviewer: When did you begin planning for college?

Lucas: I guess like once I took like the PSAT's. I think that's like sophomore year-- end of sophomore year or junior year. [...] The most prep I did was on the Princeton Review

website. So like I would just take like the quiz, the quizzes and stuff and like you put in information about like your grades in school and what kind of classes you're taking, uh what states you'd be interesting in going to. Um so that was like the main aspect of my prep and I based, honestly, the schools that I applied to off the list of stuff that like came back to me.

Despite not having help throughout the process, Lucas was accepted to Wellborn using only the basic resources he had on hand. In college, Lucas learned to develop relationships with his professors and even more so, with administrators.

In college, Lucas attended office hours, met with his professors after class, and emailed his professors. His meetings with his professors went beyond simply discussing academia:

Interviewer: Going back to professors, did you ever meet with them before or after lecture?

Lucas: Yeah um definitely like some of my other professors like outside of the engineering school and like getting lunch and stuff and just like getting real advice and like about life and stuff which was cool.

Activating his social capital, Lucas made strides to form bonds with his professors. In doing so, Lucas became more involved on campus and in academia. Furthermore, through these relationships and through being active on campus, Lucas was given career opportunities. Since graduating Lucas has returned to Wellborn to collaborate on projects with administrators and he continues to do so.

### *Carla*

Carla, like Lucas, comes from a family of immigrants and also grew up in a large metropolitan city. She attended a public elementary and middle school and for high school, she

attended a magnet school specializing in medicine. In order to attend the magnet school she had to apply and was entered into a lottery:

Interviewer: Did you apply to be in that school?

Carla: Yes so the magnet program is like a lottery um and I didn't want to go to my home school because it was known to be really bad and they like had a shooting there or something. So I like, I took the initiative. Like my parents, my mom was working at that time so it was really up to me and I applied to different schools and that one was the one I liked the most.

Wanting a better education for herself and knowing the dangers of attending her local public high school, Carla took it upon herself to apply for the magnet program. Her school provided her with exposure to the medical field and allowed her to volunteer hospitals.

However, despite the opportunities, her school did not provide sufficient support for the college application process. Applying to college was something that Carla had to do on her own without the help of her school or mentors:

Interviewer: How did your school prepare you for the college application process?

Carla: We had like our college counselor who like did presentations and I think, like I honestly don't remember counting on him that much. Like when I had like questions like I would go to him but I think it was kind of similar to my search for high schools. I mostly did it on my own.

Carla did have a guidance counselor who presented to students but she never had a one on one meeting with him. Furthermore, none of her teachers or family members guided her through the process.

Like Lucas, Carla determined which schools to apply to from her scores on the PSATs:

Interviewer: How did you find that information out with those schools?

Carla: So with the PSATs um when you took that test they would send your scores out to schools so I was getting like a bunch of brochures and stuff in the mail and that's how I found out about like all of the privates, I think, that I applied to.

Ultimately Carla decided to attend Wellborn after she was given an opportunity to tour the school. Wellborn paid for her flight and expenses to visit the university for a weekend. This was an opportunity only available to underrepresented college students.

*Avery*

Avery grew up in a single parent household, headed by her mother. She knew of her father but has never had a relationship with him. From a young age she watched her mother struggle to support Avery and her two siblings. Money was tight as her mother tried to get her house painting business off the ground and Avery's older sister turned to a life of a crime. Making roughly \$20,000 a year, Avery's mother was burdened by her eldest daughter's frequent stints in rehab and court fees. Avery describes the impact their financial situation had on her growing up:

Interviewer: Can you describe your financial situation growing up?

Avery: Um it wasn't very good. [...] my sister has been like a delinquent since she was very long. Um like 12 kind of very young and my mom is also a widow from her first husband. So like lots of just like, like my mom has had to do a lot by herself, and because of my sister's issues, we've lost a lot of money because my mom has had to send my sister to rehab and like bail her out of jail so many times. [...] Now that we have food in our fridge, I didn't know that that wasn't normal like when you walk in and the fridge is literally empty and like now that I live in a sorority house the fridge is packed all the time [...] I remember when I was like in like middle school I would walk in and there would be like Kraft singles and like three of them left and like some tortillas and that would be our food for the week so you make that shit last.



Avery knew from a young age that she wanted to go to college in order to escape the cycle of poverty. She grew up in the south and made the decision in middle school to go to a prestigious out of state college. She believed that her only way out was through education and thus, she did everything in her power to pursue an elite education.

The public education system in Avery's school district was poor and knowing that she needed to go to a good high school, she applied to an international baccalaureate high school that was more than an hour away from her home:

Interviewer: When did you begin planning for college?

Avery: Well like micro planning in regards to the fact that I knew you needed to be a well-rounded student and like go to a good school and have good SAT scores like that kind of stuff I've always known. So like that's why I chose to go to a harder high school. So like I was literally planning middle school where like I knew I needed to go to a better high school in order to get into a better college.

Avery was accepted to the high school and she did everything she could do make the most of her experience. She took multiple AP courses and matriculated at Wellborn University with 18 transfer credits. Additionally, she graduated with a 6.7 GPA.

Avery excelled in her courses, as evidenced by her astoundingly high GPA and number of college credits upon entering Wellborn. However, academics always came second to her extracurricular activities. She joined multiple clubs and was the president of seven clubs throughout her high school career. While she enjoyed participating in a multitude of clubs, she saw them primarily as a gateway to college:

Avery: So like stuff like that is also the reason why I racked up so many extracurriculars and like presidency was for that reason (to get into a good college). Like I didn't actually want to be president of all those things but like I knew I would look better on an application.

Working hard all throughout college, Avery was eventually accepted to her dream school. She did so largely without the help of others.

The guidance counselor at her school were insistent that students attend in-state colleges. Avery didn't apply to any in-state colleges. She attended meetings with her guidance counselor often but she did not provide help or resources to apply to out of state schools:

Avery: I became very close with her (the guidance counselor) but like also didn't really use her. I'm one of those people who doesn't really like doing what I'm told so like when she told me to apply to in state schools I was like "yeah I'm not gonna apply to a single one actually." So like I used her more to talk to.

Any mentorship her guidance counselor may have provided was not notable. When probed further into her relationship with her guidance counselor, Avery couldn't name any specific help that the counselor provided. Additionally, her guidance counselor grew angry with her for not taking her suggestions and as a result did not provide additional support such as reviewing college essays. Avery's college essays were written and edited solely by herself:

Interviewer: Was there any help with the college application through your school?

Avery: I honestly did everything myself. Um I read like re-read and like wrote the drafts. Like no one even read the application essays but me. I was very like, I just did it by myself. [...] Um but like most of the application process, it was a lot of just like me googling things and like trying to figure it out.

Despite having resources available to her, Avery did not know how to activate those sources of social capital to influence her trajectory. Instead, she relied on herself to find resources through internet searches.

Avery had one teacher in high school who did subtly help her with her college applications. The help was limited but Avery remembers her relationship with her theater teacher as being notable:

Interviewer: Can you describe a teacher who had a positive impact on you in high school?

Avery: I was like best friends with this teacher. Um before that (taking her theater class) I was in the drama club. I was president like I did everything with drama. I was actually like treasurer, president, and vice president. Like I literally did everything so like me and her grew very close and the fact that like when I got into Wellborn even, like she was the first person I told. Like I didn't even tell my family right away um and like when I was applying to schools and stuff like that, like when I would be like "what do you think of this school" like "this is like what I'm looking into." She would usually be like "I don't think that you would be happy there" and stuff like that but for the most part like that's kind of like the role she played or honestly I feel like she was more of a friend. [...] We got very close. We're still like very close.

She has remained in contact with her theater teacher who she considers to be a close friend.

When Avery moved to Wellborn, her teacher moved as well because she didn't feel that she had a reason to stay at the school once Avery graduated. Unlike other students who have stayed in contact with their teachers, Avery's continued contact with her teacher is not a form of managing social capital. Social capital can only be managed if there is something to activate from the relationship. In this case, the purpose of the relationship is a friendship and Avery is not drawing additional rewards that can be activated through the association.

Avery's theater teacher would often allow her to stay in class past the bell to finish her homework for other courses and would provide her with a late pass. Additionally, she offered her office so Avery could fill out college applications and work on her essays during school hours:

Interviewer: Did she provide you with any other help throughout the application process?

Avery: Um she honestly, she probably shouldn't have done this, but like she would let me like skip class and stay in her office to like apply for things that like I didn't have the time to do it at home because I have like a very like busy house as well and like it's hard to get work done there. And like she would let me sit in her office or stuff like that or like a lot of the times she would like write me late passes because I would be like feverishly like studying.

Avery's teacher took a nontraditional approach to helping her. She did not give Avery much advice but helped in the sense that she gave her additional time to work on her college applications. This was a major benefit to Avery given that her home was often loud and her sister's issues created chaos within the home.

Without any solid mentors to help her navigate through the college application process, Avery has struggled to find mentors in college as well. She frequently works with university administrators on committees and through club involvement. However, she has not formed relationships with her professors. Additionally, her GPA suffered in her first year at Wellborn and she will now have to retake one course. While in high school, Avery always put her activities first and academics second. She still follows this philosophy but keeping up with her school work in college has been a proven challenge.

In addition to her activities, Avery works three jobs on campus. She is paid through the university and receives her first payment about three weeks into the semester. Each semester she has had to put off purchasing her books and has missed the first assignments of the semester. Furthermore, she needed a clicker for one of her courses but was unable to afford it until the end of the semester. She had weekly quizzes and only took the final quiz due to her financial hardship. In situations like this where having a good relationship with her professors and mentors could benefit her. Had she activated her capital, she may have been able to find a solution to her lack of resources.

*Summary*

Students who exhibited grit had no pre-college social capital to manage. These students all found it difficult to make connections with the faculty at Wellborn. However, Lucas and Carla inevitably learned how to activate their social capital as upperclassmen. All “grit” students were undeclared in their major or changed their major. Their academic struggles were significant. However, all did learn to socially integrate with their peers and administrators. Even though Carla was on academic probation and left school for one year, she did return to Wellborn. It was at that time that she realized she needed to form relationships with faculty in order to succeed.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DEGREE ATTAINMENT

In order to understand the qualitative data and its relation to elite universities across the United States, I have analyzed several social capital measures and the affect they have on degree attainment using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 03/09. These measures illustrate the large scale patterns of social capital attainment and social mobility in terms of degree attainment.

### *Data and Measures*

The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) surveys students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in the 2003-2004 school year in the United States<sup>56</sup>. Students are followed for six years (until 2009). The initial cohort (first time beginning

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<sup>56</sup> Note: This includes the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

postsecondary students in the 2003-04 school year) is drawn from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), a nationally representative study of postsecondary students and institutions<sup>57</sup>. The BPS, with an initial cohort of 23,090 respondents, conducted in-person quantitative interviews every three years<sup>58</sup>.

My analytical sample includes only students who attended very selective and moderately selective bachelor's degree granting not-for-profit institutions<sup>59</sup>. These parameters were chosen as a means to make the sample data most closely reflect the characteristics of the elite bachelor's degree granting university, Wellborn University, the research site for the qualitative portion of this study. The total sample size is 6,530 respondents<sup>60</sup>. After eliminating those who are missing, measures of social capital (informal meetings with faculty in 2006, talking with faculty outside of class in 2006, met with academic advisor in 2006, and studied in groups in 2006) 6,320 cases are used in the analysis. Additionally, in a logistic regression analysis, I also run one model containing only first-generation college students with a sample size of 1,620 and another, only continuing-generations students had a sample size of 4,690.

### *Bachelor's Degree Attainment in 2009*

The dependent variable, bachelor's degree attainment in 2009, is a dummy variable. Students with no degree, an associate's degree, and undergraduate certificates were treated as having no bachelor's degree (coded as 0). Bachelor's degree completed includes those who obtained a bachelor's degree or higher by 2009, or within six years of initial matriculation (coded

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<sup>57</sup> The Department of Education 2011

<sup>58</sup> The Department of Education 2011

<sup>59</sup> Included in the analysis are institutions with the Carnegie 2000 codes: Doctoral/ Research Universities—Extensive, Doctoral/ Research Universities—Intensive, Master's Colleges and Universities I, Master's Colleges and Universities II, Baccalaureate Colleges—Liberal Arts, Baccalaureate Colleges—General, and Baccalaureate/ Associate's Colleges (See The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning 2001 for full list of classifications).

<sup>60</sup> All sample sizes have been rounded to 10s in compliance with NCES restricted-access data requirements.

as 1). The dependent variable was chosen to compare bachelor's degree attainment amongst first-generation and continuing-generation students. Furthermore, using degree completion as the dependent variable helps to answer the main research question of whether social capital is a valuable resource that can help first-generation students obtain a bachelor's degree.

### *Student Generation Status*

The primary independent variable is student generation status with first-generation college students (FGS) coded as 1. For the purposes of this study, first-generation college students are defined as students whose parents have not received a college degree<sup>61</sup> in the United States by the time the student entered college. Continuing-generation college students (CGS)<sup>62</sup> (coded as 0) are defined as students with at least one degree-holding parent, including an Associate's degree, in the United States by the time the student has matriculated<sup>63</sup>.

### *Measures of Social Capital*

Four independent variables serve as measures of social capital: the frequency respondents (1) had informal meetings with faculty, (2) talked to faculty outside of class, (3) met with an academic advisor, and (4) studied in groups. All four variables have three possible answers: never, sometimes, and often.

### *Control Variables*

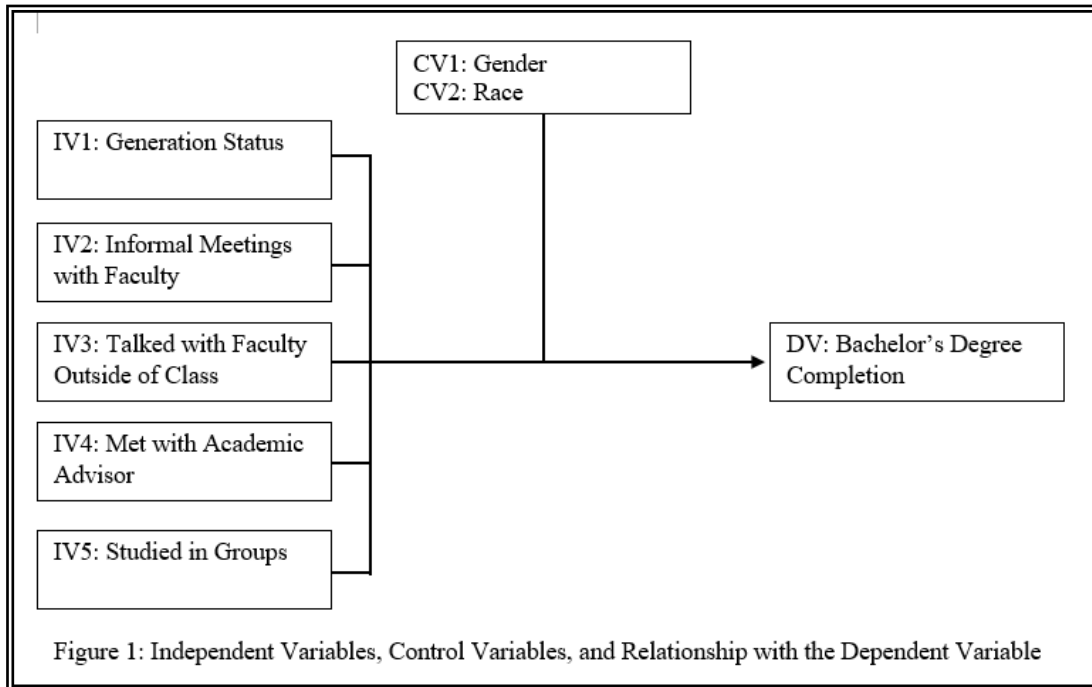
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<sup>61</sup> Note: This does not include completion of trade or vocational schools.

<sup>62</sup> Continuing-generation students are also known as "non-first-generation" students and "traditional students."

<sup>63</sup> Note: Students who did not list their parents' educational attainment will not be included.

All models contain gender and race as control variables. Figure 1 displays the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent and control variables.



## RESULTS

### *Chi-square Results*



Table 1: Descriptive Statistics	
Completed Bachelors in 09 %	71.81
Race %	
White	72.73
Black	8.5
Hispanic	7.78
Other	10.99
Gender %	
Male	42.81
Female	57.19
Met with Faculty 06 %	
Never	44.05
Sometimes	43.22
Often	12.73
Talked to Faculty 06 %	
Never	7.47
Sometimes	54.74
Often	37.79
Met with Academic Advisor 06%	
Never	8.79
Sometimes	66.5
Often	24.71
Studied in Groups 06 %	
Never	21.76
Sometimes	59.26
Often	18.98
Generation Status %	
FGS	26.42
CGS	73.48

The full sample descriptive statistics (see Table 1) display the demographics of all students attending bachelor's degree granting very selective and moderately selective not-for-profit institutions. Additionally, percentages of social capital activation frequency are presented. Of all of the respondents, 72% received a bachelor's degree in 2009. The majority of the students (73%) are white. Nine percent of the students are black, 8% Hispanic, and 11% are other races or

more than one race. Over half of the respondents are female (57%). Approximately 74% of the students are continuing-generation students, while 26% are first-generation students.

Students were most likely to say they never (44%) or sometimes (43%) met with faculty. Conversely, only 7% of students never talked with faculty. The majority of students sometimes talked with faculty (55%), while 38% often talked to faculty. Far fewer students never met with their academic advisor (9%) than those who sometimes (67%) or often (25%) met with their advisor. Overall, students were most likely to sometimes study in groups, with 59% reporting that they sometimes studied in groups.

		Bachelor's Degree		
		FGS	CGS	All Respondants
Completed Bachelors in 09 %		22.71	77.29	
Race %		***	***	***
	White	66.54	78.55	75.61
	Black	11.62	5.51	6.97
	Hispanic	10.68	5.18	6.4
	Other	11.15	10.77	11.01
Gender %		***	***	***
	Male	36.93	41.53	40.57
	Female	63.07	58.47	59.43
Met with Faculty 06 %		***	***	***
	Never	45.06	39.3	40.7
	Sometimes	42.33	47.07	45.92
	Often	12.61	13.63	13.38
Talked to Faculty 06 %		***	***	***
	Never	6.3	5.25	5.56
	Sometimes	54.94	53.45	53.76
	Often	38.76	41.29	40.68
Met with Academic Advisor 06%		***	***	***
	Never	7.06	6.58	6.72
	Sometimes	65.57	67.94	67.42
	Often	27.38	25.48	25.85
Studied in Groups 06 %		***	***	***
	Never	19	17.16	17.67
	Sometimes	64.25	61.83	62.33
	Often	16.75	21.01	20
Generation Status %				***
	FGS			22.71
	CGS			77.29

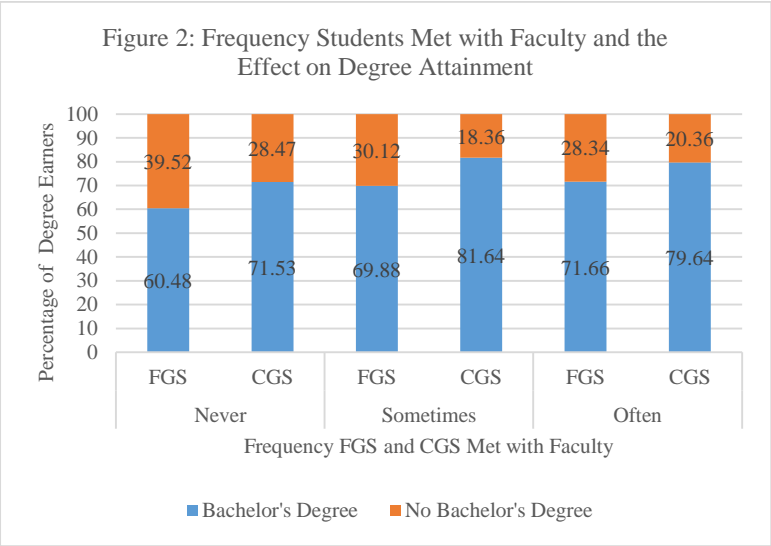
Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of those who have completed a bachelor's degree, as well as chi square tests that show the results between completion of a degree and student

characteristics and social capital measures. Results indicate the percentage of students who earned a bachelor's degree and the frequency they engaged in social capital activities for each category of generation status. Of those who completed a bachelor's degree in 2009, 23% were first-generation and 77% were continuing-generation. First-generation college students were more ethnically diverse than their continuing-generation counterparts: 67% are white, 12% black, 11% Hispanic, and 11% were of another race or more than one race. While continuing-generation students' reported ethnicity was 79%, 6%, 5%, and 11% respectively. There are more female students who complete a degree among both the first-generation and continuing-generation students. Among first-generation college students who earned a bachelor's degree, 45% never met with faculty, 42% sometimes met with faculty, and 13% often met with faculty. All chi-square results were statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The percentage of first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students who never, sometimes, or often engaged in social capital associations were similar across all social capital variables. However, a higher percentage of first-generation college students who obtained a bachelor's degree never met with faculty, talked to faculty outside of class, met with their academic advisor, or studied in groups than their continuing-generation bachelor's degree holding counterparts. Furthermore, the percentage of first-generation college students who never engaged in these associations is higher than that of all respondents. For all social capital variables, first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students were most likely to report that they were activated social capital "sometimes."

Table 3: Chi-Square Results of Social Capital Frequency by Generation Status and Degree Completion																
	Met with Faculty			***	Talked to Faculty			***	Met with Academic Advisor			***	Studied in Groups 06 %			***
	Never	Sometimes	Often		Never	Sometimes	Often		Never	Sometimes	Often		Never	Sometimes	Often	
FGS Degree Completion																
Bachelor's Degree %	60.48	69.88	71.66		47.52	64.53	71.4		48.08	67.34	67.36		50.5	71.59	66.17	
No Bachelor's Degree %	39.52	30.12	28.34		52.48	35.47	28.6		51.92	32.66	32.64		49.5	28.41	33.83	
CGS Degree Completion																
Bachelor's Degree %	71.53	81.64	79.64		57.93	75.81	82.36		59.65	77.74	81.45		64.02	80.21	81.37	
No Bachelor's Degree %	28.47	18.36	20.36		42.07	24.19	17.64		40.35	22.26	18.55		35.98	19.79	18.63	

Chi-square tests were also performed to display the percentage of first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students who received a degree based on the frequency they engaged in social capital activities (see table 3 and figures 2-5). All results are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  and show significant differences in degree completion between first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students.



Next, I examine more closely the association between social capital measures and completion of degree by student generation status. Figure 2 displays the frequency students met with faculty and the percentage of degree completion. In figure 2, for each category (never, sometimes, often) of Students Met with Faculty, continuing-generation college students were more likely to graduate than their first-generation counterparts. Of the first-generation college students who never met with faculty, 60% graduated but 72% of continuing-generation college

students who never met with faculty graduated. Of those who sometimes met with faculty, 70% of first-generation students graduated and 82% of continuing generation college students graduated. Of those who met with faculty often, 72% of first-generation students graduated while 80% of continuing-generation college students earned their degree. The frequency with which students met with faculty was important, for both first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students, those who never met with faculty have the lowest percentage of completing a degree as compared to those who sometimes or often met with faculty. However, the percentage of continuing-generation college students who never met with faculty (71.53% or ~72%) and graduated is similar to the percentage of first-generation college students who often met with faculty and graduated (71.66% or ~72%).

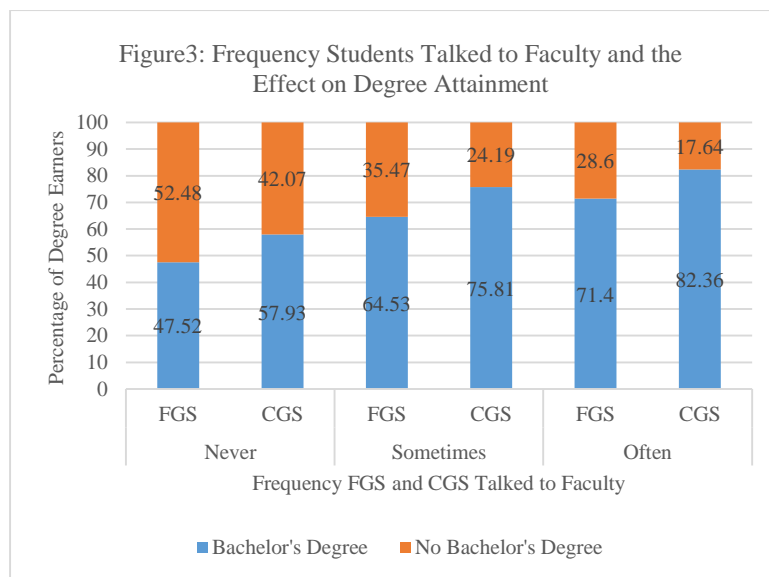


Figure 3 shows a similar trend. For both first-generation and continuing-generation students, those who reported that they talked to faculty often have the highest percentage of completing a degree, as compared to those who never or sometimes talked to faculty. Figure 3 also shows that for each category of the frequency students talked to faculty, continuing-generation students have a higher percentage of degree completion than first-generation students.

About 48% of first-generation college students who never talked to faculty earned their degree, while 58% of continuing-generation college students who never talked to faculty earned theirs. Sixty-five percent of first-generation students who sometimes talked to faculty earned their degree and 71% who often talked to faculty received their degree. Seventy-six percent of continuing- generation college students who sometimes talked to faculty graduated and 82% who often met with faculty graduated.

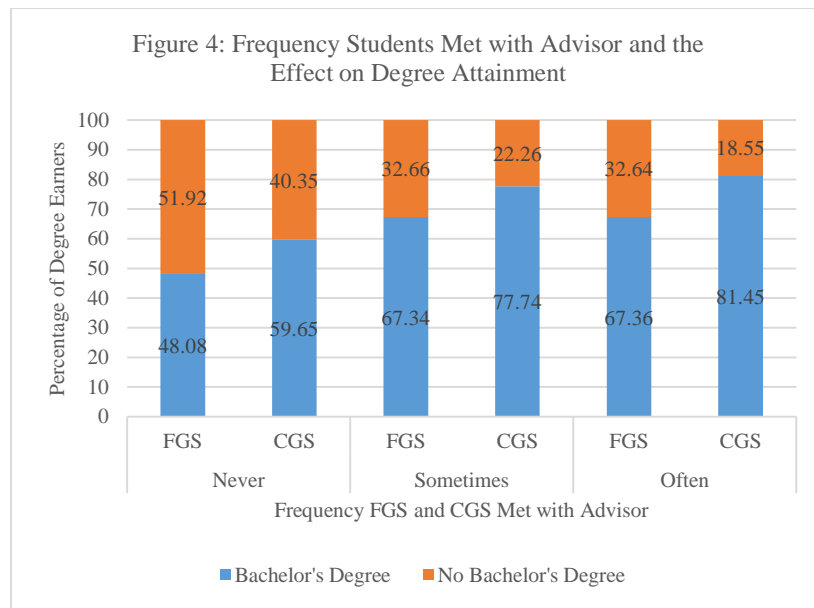


Figure 4 displays the frequency students met with their academic advisor and the percentage of those who graduated by student generation status. For both first-generation students and continuing-generation students, those who never met with their advisors have the lowest percentage of degree completion, as compared to those who reported they sometimes and often meet with advisor. Approximately the same percentage of first-generation college students who sometimes met with their advisor (67.34%) and often met with their advisor (67.36%) earned their degree. Only 48% of first-generation students who never met with their advisor earned their degree, while 60% of continuing-generation college students who never met with

their advisor did. Seventy-eight percent of continuing-generation college students who sometimes met with their advisor obtained a degree and 81% who often met with their advisor earned a degree.

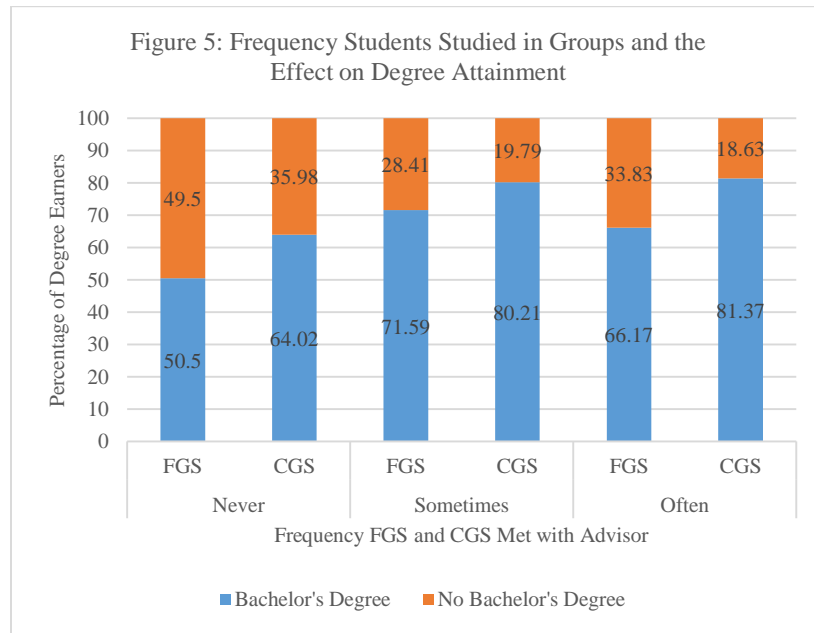


Figure 5 displays the frequency students studied in groups and the percentage of those students who graduated by student generation status. Again, we see that students who never studied in groups have the lowest percentage of completing their degree, and it is true for both first-generation and continuing-generation students. Approximately half of first-generation college students who never studied in groups earned their degree. A larger percentage of first-generation college students who sometimes studied in groups (72%) graduated than first-generation students who often studied in groups (66%). The percentage of continuing-generation college students who sometimes studied in groups and graduated was similar to that of those who often studied groups with 80% and 81%, respectively. Sixty-four percent of continuing-generation college students who never studied in groups earned their degree.

The descriptive statistics portray a discrepancy between first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students and the percentage who successfully complete a bachelor's degree within six years. For all social capital measures, more continuing-generation college students activate social capital. Furthermore, even when continuing-generation students do not activate their social capital, they are more likely than first-generation college students to earn a bachelor's degree. However, for both first-generation and continuing-generation college students, they were more likely to earn their degree if they sometimes or often activated their capital rather than never doing so. This finding demonstrates that activating social capital is rewarded for both groups but continuing-generation college students are more likely to benefit from that activation.

### *Logistic Regression Results*

Next, I ran a set of logistic regression models to further explore the effect of social capital measure on degree completion. For all models, the dependent variable is Bachelor's Degree Attainment. Independent variables include Generation Status, Informal Meetings with Faculty, Talked with Faculty, Met with Academic Advisor, and Studied in Groups. The social capital measures are added each in a separate model (model 1 to 5). Model 6 is the full model with all independent variables included. All models also control for Gender and Race/Ethnicity. Models 1-6 use the full sample of all students at very selective and moderately selective bachelor's degree granting universities. I then ran the full model on subsamples by student generation status (model 7 and 8). Table 4 presents the logistic analysis results. Odds ratio are reported with z-score in parenthesis.



Student generation status and all social capital variables are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  for all full sample models (models 1-6). Furthermore, control variables gender and race are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  for the full sample. However, the significance of race= other changed throughout the models, being insignificant in model one, three, and four. The significance of social capital variables and race vary between model 7 and 8, when I ran the full model (model 6) on subsamples by student generation status.

	Full Sample						FGS (7)	CGS (8)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)		
Generation Status (FGS as Ref.)	0.554*** (-9.66)	0.611*** (-7.63)	0.605*** (-7.77)	0.595*** (-8.03)	0.611*** (-7.57)	0.620*** (-7.25)		
Informal Meetings with Faculty (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes		1.718*** (8.57)				1.419*** (5.28)	1.358*** (2.55)	1.458*** (4.72)
Often		1.590*** (4.86)				1.153 (1.35)	1.316 (1.38)	1.095 (0.73)
Talked with Faculty (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes			2.122*** (7.36)			1.429*** (3.26)	1.355 (1.54)	1.46*** (2.88)
Often			2.989*** (10.15)			1.777*** (4.67)	1.728** (2.46)	1.808*** (4.01)
Met with Academic Advisor (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes				2.208*** (8.37)		1.655*** (5.03)	1.637*** (2.68)	1.644*** (4.16)
Often				2.606*** (8.93)		1.591*** (3.88)	1.27 (1.11)	1.76*** (3.91)
Studied in Groups (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes					2.318*** (12.19)	1.936*** (9.17)	2.076*** (5.63)	1.885*** (7.30)
Often					2.329*** (9.32)	1.790*** (5.94)	1.583** (2.57)	1.889*** (5.39)
Gender (Male as Ref.)	1.442*** (6.48)	1.465*** (6.46)	1.372*** (5.32)	1.392*** (5.58)	1.4*** (5.65)	1.366*** (5.15)	1.331** (2.56)	1.375*** (4.40)
Race/ Ethnicity (White as Ref.)								
Black	0.532*** (-6.64)	0.525*** (-6.48)	0.531*** (-6.35)	0.522*** (-6.51)	0.516*** (-6.60)	0.523*** (-6.39)	0.621*** (-3.05)	0.476*** (-5.56)
Hispanic	0.534*** (-6.40)	0.527*** (-6.27)	0.548*** (-5.87)	0.543*** (-5.96)	0.517*** (-6.40)	0.540*** (-5.90)	0.784 (-1.44)	0.436*** (-6.30)
Other	0.887 (-1.32)	0.829** (-1.98)	0.859 (-1.60)	0.859 (-1.60)	0.828** (-1.99)	0.849* (-1.70)	1.152 (0.76)	0.752** (-2.53)
N	6,530	6,320	6,320	6,320	6,320	6,320	1,620	4,690
Pseudo R2	0.029	0.037	0.040	0.037	0.048	0.063	0.048	0.057

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ . T-statistics in paranthesis

### *Model one*

Model 1 includes only student generation status as the main predictor of degree completion. When controlling for race and gender, first-generation college students are 44.6% less likely to obtain a degree than continuing-generation college students are. Their odds of completing a bachelor's degree increases when controlling for social capital variables in models 2-6.

### *Model two*

Model 2 added in measures of informal meetings with faculty. When controlling for informal meeting with faculty, first-generation college students are still 39% less likely to obtain a degree than their continuing-generation college student counterparts. Students who sometimes met with faculty were 72% more likely to obtain a degree than those who never met with faculty and students who met with faculty often were 59% more likely to obtain a degree, when controlling for generation status, gender, and race.

### *Model three*

Model 3 includes the frequency with which students talked with faculty outside of class. Students who sometimes talked with faculty were 1.12 times more likely than those who never talked to faculty to obtain a degree when controlling for generation status, gender, and race. Students who often talked to faculty were nearly twice as likely to obtain a degree. First-

generation college students were 40% less likely to obtain a college degree, given the other variables are held constant.

#### *Model four*

Model 4 includes meetings with students' academic advisor. Students who sometimes met with their academic advisor were 1.2 times more likely to obtain a degree than those who never met with their advisor and those who met with their advisor often were 1.6 times more likely to earn a degree. First-generation college students were 41% less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree when controlling for meetings with academic advisors, gender, and race.

#### *Model five*

Model 5 includes the frequency students studied in groups. When controlling for studying in groups, gender, and race first-generation college students were 39% less likely to earn a degree than continuing-generation college students. Students who sometimes and often studied in groups were 2.3 times more likely to graduate within six years than those who never studied in groups.

#### *Model six*

Model 6 is the full model, with all social capital measures included. When controlling for all social capital variables, first-generation college students are 38% less likely to obtain a degree than continuing-generation college students. Students who sometimes and often met with faculty

were 42% and 15%, respectively, more likely to earn a degree than those who never meet with faculty. Students who sometimes talked with faculty were 43% more likely to earn a degree and 77% of students who often spoke with faculty were more likely to earn a degree than those who never spoke to faculty. Students who sometimes met with their academic advisor were 66% more likely to earn a degree and students who often met with their advisor were 59% more likely to earn a degree than those who did not meet with their advisor. With all variables being constant, studying in groups sometimes or often greatly increased the odds of completing a degree. Those who sometimes studied in groups were 94% more likely to earn a degree and those who often studied in groups were 79% more likely to obtain a degree than students who did not study in groups.

#### *Model seven*

Model 7 is the full model run on the subsample with only first-generation college students. First-generation college students who sometimes met with faculty 36% more likely to earn a degree than students who never met with faculty and these results were significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Results for first-generation college students who often met with faculty were insignificant and often met with an academic advisor were insignificant. Additionally, results for students who sometimes talked with faculty were insignificant. Students who often talked with faculty were 73% more likely to earn a degree than those who never met with faculty and these results are significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Students who sometimes met with their academic advisor were 64% more likely to earn a degree. This was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Students who sometimes studied in groups were 1.08 times more likely to earn a degree than those who never studied in groups and this was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Slightly less significant at

$p < 0.05$  were students who studied in groups often. These students were 58% more likely to earn a degree than those who never studied in groups. Across all models except for model 7, race=Hispanic was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . However, there is no significance in model 7. Additionally in all models there was a decrease in the odds that black, Hispanic, and other students would earn a degree when compared to white students with the exception of the race=other in model 7. Although not statistically significant, students with a race categorized as other are 15% more likely to graduate than white students. The interpretation of this result should be approached with caution given the lack of significance.

#### *Model eight*

Model 8 is the full model run on the subsample with only continuing-generation college students. When controlling for all variables, continuing generation college students who sometimes held informal meetings with faculty were 46% more likely to graduate than those who never held meetings. Like the first-generation college students in model 7, the results for those who often attended informal meeting was statistically insignificant. In model 7 no statistical significance was found for students who sometimes talked with faculty but this was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  for continuing-generation college students in model 8. Those who sometimes and often talked with faculty were 46% and 80% more likely, respectively, to earn a bachelor's degree. Like the first-generation college students, continuing-generation college students were 64% more likely to earn a degree if they sometimes met with their academic advisor than if they never met with an academic advisor. Often meeting with academic advisors was insignificant for first-generation college students but it was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  for continuing generation college students who were 76% more likely to earn a degree than those

who never met with an advisor. Continuing-generation college students who sometimes and often studied in groups were 89% and 90%, respectively, more likely to earn a degree than those who did not study in groups. This was statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

### *Summary*

Across all models, participation in social capital activities, whether sometimes or often, increased the odds that a student would obtain a bachelor's degree. The social capital findings demonstrated in the logistic regression full sample models were found to be significant indicators of degree completion. Students' who activate their social capital by meeting with faculty, talking to faculty, meeting with their academic advisor, and/ or studying in groups have an increased chance of degree completion when compared to those who do not. These findings may indicate that the social capital students hold and their ability to activate that social capital improve their odds of earning a degree. Although some of the social capital variables in models 7 and 8 were not found to be significant, there was no indication that participation decreased their odds of earning a degree.

In models 1-6, first-generation college students were 38% to 45% less likely to earn their degree when controlling for other variables than their continuing-generation counterparts. When not controlling for any social capital variables, first-generation college students were 45% percent less likely to obtain agree. Conversely, when controlling for all social capital variables, that was reduced from 45% to 38% less likely to earn a degree than continuing-generation students. This finding suggests that activating social capital increases the odds that first-generation college students will earn a degree. When controlling for informal meetings with

faculty in model 2 and studying in groups in model 5, first-generation college students were 39% less likely to earn a degree than continuing-generation students. These were the highest odds for first-generation degree completion amongst single social capital indicators.

When controlling for all variables in models 7, first-generation college students saw the greatest increase in the odds of degree completion when they sometimes studied in groups. Those who sometimes studied in groups were 1.08 times more likely to receive their degree than those who never studied in groups. Additionally, talking to faculty often was a significant indicator of degree completion, increasing the likelihood of degree completion by 73% over those who never talked to faculty. Results of first-generation college students who met with faculty and met with their academic advisor often was not found to be significant. In other words, the percentage of students who met with faculty often and the percentage of students who met their academic advisor often and completed their degree, is similar to the percentage of students who did not obtain their degree.

These results may indicate that first-generation college students are being reactive rather than proactive in their frequent meetings with faculty and/or advisors. Frequent meetings may be a result of poor grades or other mishaps that students address when it is too late to resolve the issues and may prolong degree completion. Additionally, those who have completed their degree but met with faculty and/or their advisor reactively may have been able to resolve issues and not forfeit their ability to graduate.

While continuing-generation students appear to fair better in college, there is hope for first-generation students. By activating their social capital and acting as active agents to secure resources for themselves, first-generation students may be able to improve their chances of degree completion.

## SUMMARY

The findings of this study indicate that social and cultural capital activation, accumulation, and management are imperative to the well-being and academic success of students. From the qualitative findings, those who had aggregate mentors appeared to fair the best in terms of staying on track with their academics and being involved on campus. I found that those with aggregate mentors were the most equipped to activate, accumulate, and manage their social capital. Those with other mentoring relationships had varying forms of activation, accumulation, and management of the forms of capital.

Students with guardian mentors successfully managed their social capital with their pre-college mentors. However, they struggled to form new relationships while in college. Both students within this category did not activate, accumulate, or manage social capital from their professors. However, they differed in the social capital gained through peer networks. Furthermore, both students were unsure of their academic futures. They are undeclared in their majors and did not show signs of determining their major at the time of our interview.

Students with assigned mentors did not manage their social capital from their pre-college mentoring relationships. There was variation in the ways they activated, accumulated, and managed their forms of capital in college. Donna, being only a freshman, did not form relationships with her peers or the faculty. Conversely, Bailey and Paige both made strides to activate their social capital but were limited in the amount of rewards they were able to gain from those relationships.

My data revealed that students within the grit category had the most difficulty in navigating their academics. These students were undeclared in their majors, switched majors,



and took substantial time to adapt to college life. Avery, a sophomore at the time of this study, had not yet formed relationships with her professors. She did however, form relationships with the administrators on campus and her peers. Carla and Lucas began forming relationships with their professors once they were upperclassman. As underclassman they struggled to develop peer networks and connect with faculty.

The quantitative data illustrates that activating social capital through informal meetings with faculty, speaking with faculty outside of class, meeting with their advisor, and/or studying in groups increases the likelihood of bachelor's degree completion. This is true for both first-generation and continuing-generation college students. However, overall, continuing-generation college students were more likely to graduate in all models. Furthermore, for each measure of social capital, activation increased their odds of degree completion.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Hidden behind ivy-covered buildings are stories that do not unfold in the same ways for first-generation college students and those from more advantaged backgrounds. For some first-generation college students, the Ivory Tower is a place of isolation, tangled in ivy, they often cannot free themselves long enough to truly experience the benefits of social and cultural capital gains. It is here that social origins and cultural dispositions matter; where the absence of a college educated parent lowers your chances of attaining institutionalized capital. This study has identified the ways in which students gain social and cultural capital through their mentoring relationships. Further, the quantitative portion of this study illustrates the role of social capital in degree attainment for both first-generation and continuing-generation students.

Through fourteen interviews with current and best students of Wellborn University, I categorized their mentoring relationships into four types: guardian mentors, aggregate mentors, assigned mentors, and grit (or those without mentors). The ability for students to activate, accumulate, and manage their social and cultural capital varied between the categories and further, slightly within the categories.

The students who activated, accumulated, and managed the most social and cultural capital had aggregate mentors. These students were able to make social connections through peer groups, with faculty, and with administrators. Through the activation of their social capital, they were equipped to activate, accumulate, and manage cultural capital. Furthermore, these students were the most comfortable in navigating college life and expressed confidence in their academic abilities.

Conversely, students with guardian mentors, assigned mentors, and those without mentors (grit), found it difficult to activate their social and cultural capital. This was particularly true for the first-year and second-year students. Upperclassmen and those who graduated, learned to activate their social and cultural capital as they progressed in academia. Overall, these students did not fully integrate into Wellborn University, whether that be through forming relationships with the faculty or their peers.

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data revealed that social capital matters in terms of navigating and progressing through academia. The more social capital a student holds, the more likely they are to be academically successful and happy while in college. Furthermore, it greatly impacts their ability to socially integrate and navigate college. The quantitative data supports the findings of the qualitative data in that students who activate social

capital are less likely to drop out and complete their degree within six years of initial matriculation.

From these findings I can make several suggestions for ways in which first-generation college students can be supported throughout college. Students who participated in WUSAP reflected positively upon their experience and listed a number of benefits from their participation. However, most students stated that it was not long enough (three weeks). I recommend increasing the program to four or more weeks and offering continued education for the full duration of the students' undergraduate academic careers. Many students stated that they would like more help with how to talk to professors, a larger variety of courses (major specific courses), and how to find a job after college. I believe it would benefit students to have workshops addressing their specific needs beyond their first year of college.

One of the most common issues that students spoke of in their interviews was the faculty's lack of understanding and acknowledgement of their first-generation status. Overall, the students felt that they were behind their continuing-generation peers in terms of understanding the rudimentary concepts necessary for understanding their courses. They believed that because Wellborn University is an elite college, their professors expected them to have come from the highest ranked secondary schools with a solid foundation for college. This created feelings of imposter syndrome, or believing that they were unworthy and/or incapable of performing well in their courses.

In order to better support students, I suggest that professors attend trainings and/or workshops that address the needs of first-generation college students and other marginalized student populations. I strongly suggest that institutions make this a priority as it was addressed by all fourteen students in this study as being an issue that impacts or has impacted their life at

Wellborn. I believe the best way to address the specific issues would be to hold panel discussions with first-generation college students.

There are several limitations to this study that need to be considered. First, the qualitative interviews concentrate on first-generation college students from one elite university. To the best of my knowledge, no study has qualitatively analyzed the differences between first-generation and continuing-generation college students. Additionally, one elite university cannot serve as the paragon for all elite institutions. Second, the qualitative study samples from a variety of cohorts to measure change across time, but a better method would be to re-interview each student in one year increments from the time they matriculate to several years after expected degree attainment. Finally, to fully understand the experience of first-generation college students, interviews with parents, educators, and gatekeepers can provide insights that the students themselves were unaware of.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

*Andre:*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 27

Class Year: 2010

Race: Black

Family Composition: Mother, father, and two brothers.

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Some community college

Father's Highest Level of Education: GED

Adolescent Neighborhood: Urban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Magnet

High School Type: Magnet

College Preparation Program: Wellborn University Summer Transformation

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*Avery:*

Mentoring Relationship: Grit

Age: 19

Class Year: 2018

Race: White

Family Composition: Mother, father (estranged), brother, sister, and adoptive brother

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Middle school

Father's Highest Level of Education: Some high school

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public and magnet

High School Type: Magnet

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Bailey:*

Mentoring Relationship: Assigned Mentor

Age: 22

Class Year: 2016

Race: Hispanic

Family Composition: Mother, father, and sister

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High school in South America

Father's Highest Level of Education: Elementary school in South America

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public and private

Middle School Type: Private

High School Type: Magnet

College Preparation Program: Students Achieving Academic Success (SAAS)

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*Carla:*

Mentoring Relationship: Grit

Age: 23

Class Year: 2016

Race: White Hispanic

Family Composition: Mother, father, and one brother.

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High school in Mexico and GED in America

Father's Highest Level of Education: Elementary school

Adolescent Neighborhood: Urban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Magnet

College Preparation Program: None

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*Cecilia:*

Mentoring Relationship: Guardian Mentor

Age: 19

Class Year: 2018

Race: Mexican

Family Composition: Mother, father, and two sisters

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High school and technical school (cosmetology)

Father's Highest Level of Education: Middle school

Adolescent Neighborhood: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Public

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Donna:*

Mentoring Relationship: Assigned Mentor

Age: 18

Class Year: 2019

Race: Asian

Family Composition: Mother, father, and one sister.

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High school

Father's Highest Level of Education: Some high school

Adolescent Neighborhood: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Public

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Eve:*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 19

Class Year: 2019

Race: Black

Family Composition: Mother, father, and brother

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Some college

Father's Highest Level of Education: Some high school

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Urban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Charter

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Jordan:*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 34

Class Year: 2005

Race: Black Mixed

Family Composition: Mother, father, two sisters, one brother, wife, and two children.

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Not sure (likely some high school)

Father's Highest Level of Education: Not sure (likely some high school)

Adolescent Neighborhood: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Public

College Preparation Program: College preparatory school post high school

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*Keith*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 19

Class Year: 2018

Race: Caucasian

Family Composition: Mother and father

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High school

Father's Highest Level of Education: High school

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Rural

Elementary School Type: Private Catholic

Middle School Type: Private Catholic

High School Type: Public

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Lucas:*

Mentoring Relationship: Grit

Age: 26

Class Year: 2011

Race: Black

Family Composition: Mother, father, and brother

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Some college

Father's Highest Level of Education: Some college

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Urban

Elementary School Type: Private Catholic

Middle School Type: Private Catholic

High School Type: Private Catholic

College Preparation Program: Wellborn University Summer Transformation

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*Marshall:*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 18

Class Year: 2019

Race: Black

Family Composition: Mother, father, two brothers, and two half-sisters

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Some college

Father's Highest Level of Education: GED

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Urban

Elementary School Type: Private Catholic

Middle School Type: Two charter schools and two public schools

High School Type: Charter

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Miranda:*

Mentoring Relationship: Guardian Mentor

Age: 19

Class Year: 2018

Race: Hispanic

Family Composition: Mother, father, step-mother, three half-brothers, and a half-sister

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Some high school

Father's Highest Level of Education: Some high school

Adolescent Neighborhood: Rural and urban

Elementary School Type: Public and private Catholic (in South America)

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Public and private Catholic (in South America)

College Preparation Program: WUSAP

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*Paige:*

Mentoring Type: Assigned Mentor

Age: 19

Class Year: 2018

Race: White

Family Composition: Mother, father, two brothers, and one sister.

Mother's Highest Level of Education: High School

Father's Highest Level of Education: High School

Adolescent Neighborhood: Suburban

Elementary School Type: Public

Middle School Type: Public

High School Type: Public

College Preparation Program: Oscar Kirk Foundation; WUSAP

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*Wynn:*

Mentoring Relationship: Aggregate Mentors

Age: 21

Class Year: 2016

Race: Asian American

Family Composition: Mother and father

Mother's Highest Level of Education: Bachelor's equivalent from South Korea

Father's Highest Level of Education: Law degree from South Korea

Adolescent Neighborhood Type: Urban

Elementary School Type: Public and magnet

Middle School Type: Magnet

High School Type: Magnet

College Preparation Program: None



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### I. Adolescent Education

- Tell me about the first school you went to. What was it like? (Repeat for each school)
- How did you get to and from school?
- What school resources did you use? Did you have your own computer?
- Did you use a planner? If so, how did you use it? How did you learn to do this?
- How did you prioritize your responsibilities? How did you learn to do this?
- Did you take notes during class? How did you take notes? How did you organize your notes?
- How did you study? Where did you study? How did you take/organize notes?
- Did you read all of your required readings? How? Did you complete all of your homework? How?
- Did you take advanced courses? Did you receive college credits while in high school?
- Thinking back to a time when you had a lot to do, how were you able to manage your time?
- How did your school prepare you for the college application process? College in general?
- Do you think they could have better prepared you? If so, how?
- Can you describe your teacher(s) who had a positive impact on you? Can you walk me through the last conversation you had with them?

- Can you describe any other adults who had a positive impact on you? Mentors?  
Can you walk me through the last conversation you had with them?

## II. Parental Involvement in Adolescent Education

- What did your parents do to earn a living?
- What was your financial situation like growing up?
- Can you describe your relationship with your parents growing up?
- Did your parents attend school functions? Were either of your parents involved with your school's PTO?
- Did your parents attend parent/teacher conferences?
- Were your parents ever called in by a teacher or principal to discuss your behavior or performance? Did you get in trouble with your parents as a result?
- Did your parents keep a calendar? Did it include your activities/deadlines? Where was the calendar?

## III. Adolescent Activities

- What school sponsored activities did you participate in such as clubs or sports in xxx school?
- What activities (including camps) did you participate in that were not sponsored by the school?
- How did you get to and from your activities?
- Have you volunteered before college? Were you required to volunteer? How did you start volunteering at xxx?

## IV. University Academia

- What do you hope to get out of college? Is this the same as what you hoped for when you were a junior in high school?
- When did you begin planning for college?
- How did you decide to go to college?
- What is/ was your subject of study? How did you choose this subject of study?
- Do you have siblings who are attending college?
- What has been your biggest challenge academically?
- How do you determine how you will approach professors? How do you determine which ones you will approach?
- How often do you meet with professors directly before or after class? For what reason?
- Can you describe your last conversation with a professor?
- Is there another conversation that you have had that sticks out in your mind?
- Do you attend office hours? For what reason? What is your comfort level? How did you learn how to do this?
- Do you email professors? For what reason? What is your comfort level? How did you learn how to do this?
- Do you set up appointments with professors? For what reason? What is your comfort level? How did you learn how to do this?
- How is the relationship you have with your professors different now as opposed to when you began college? Do you approach professors differently? If so, how?
- Are there times when it was difficult to understand professors? Why is it difficult?
- Do you raise your hand in class? Do you participate in in-class group discussions?

- Have you had to repeat any courses?
- Where do you study? How do you study? Do you take notes while studying? How do you organize your notes?
- Do you take notes during lectures? How do you take notes? How do you organize notes?
- What university resources do you use?
- How do you feel about course syllabuses? Are they organized in a manner you can understand? How much do you rely on the syllabus for course information? Do you feel syllabuses could be improved?
- How do you prioritize your responsibilities?
- Do you use a planner? How do you use it? How often do you use it?
- In your opinion, does social class affect academic life? If so, how?
- What do you wish professors understood about first-generation college students?
- What do you wish faculty members/administration understood about first-generation college students?

#### V. University Activities

- Are you involved in any school clubs? Do you hold a leadership position? Why? How often do you attend meetings? How did you choose this club?
- Do you participate in school sports?
- Are you involved in any clubs or sports that are not affiliated with the university?
- Do you volunteer? Can you describe your volunteering activities? Is it required as part of your program? Why do you volunteer?
- Have you been in a first-generation program? If yes:

- a. What is your favorite aspect of the program? Least favorite aspect?
- b. Can you describe your most memorable experience with the program?
- c. If you could change/add anything what would you change?
- d. In what ways was the program a benefit to you?

## VI. University Life and Socialization

- Is college life what you pictured it to be? If not, how is it different? What was most surprising?
- Can you walk me through your first day of classes? (set scene)
- Can you describe your process of getting oriented to university life?
- Can you describe your experience with making friends?
- Do you have plans to or are you involved in Greek life?
- How do you feel about the type of language your peers use/ how they speak? Is this different from the language you use? Is it different from how you speak? If yes, how so? If no, where did you learn to speak like this?
- Do you have a job? Where? How many hours do you work? How does it affect your academics and social life?
- In your opinion, does social class affect social life at Lehigh?
- What do you wish your peers understood about first-generation college students?

## VII. Parental Relationship in College

- Can you describe your relationship with your parents during college? How has it changed?
- Did your parents help you with your decision to attend college? How?

- How much financial support do you receive from your parents? Emotional support? Academic Support?
- Have your parents noticed differences in the way you speak? Attire? Other changes? Please describe.
- Do your parents know what you're doing in school? Do they ask questions?
- What do you wish your parents knew about college?

#### VIII. Future

- Can you describe your career goals?
- What personal assets do you believe are most important in achieving your goals?  
Academic assets?
- What social class do you expect to belong to?

#### IX. Closing questions

- Do you have any ideas for resources that would help you?
- Are there any questions that I have asked that you would like to go back to and elaborate on?
- Can you think of any questions that I should ask first-generation college students to better understand their experience?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

#### X. Background Questions

- Age
- Class year/ year graduated
- Highest degree held/ intend to hold

- Family Structure- siblings, parents, step, half
- Race
- Where did you live as an adolescent? What was the neighborhood like?
- What is your parent's educational background?
- Parent's income
- Current income
- Can you describe your financial aid package including grants, scholarships, work study programs, student loans or other sources of aid?

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

The following consent form that participants were required to sign prior to their interview was approved by the IRB committee at Lehigh University. Some of the information contained in this form has been removed in order to uphold the integrity of confidential research and to not disclose the name of the university of which this study has taken place. All other information remains the same.

### CONSENT FORM

#### First-Generation College Students and their Mechanisms for Attaining Cultural Capital

You are invited to be in a research study of first-generation college students. You were selected as a possible participant because of your first-generation college student status and your current or previous enrollment at [REDACTED]. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**This study is being conducted by:** Brittany Ridge, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, under the direction of Dr. Heather Beth Johnson, Associate Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

#### **Background Information**

##### **The purpose of this study is:**

The aim of the study is to learn about the people who currently or have previously attended an elite university with first-generation college student status.

#### **Procedures**

##### **If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:**

I will schedule one interview with you. Ideally, the interview will be conducted in one session lasting approximately one to three hours. I will audio record the interview(s) and make transcriptions from the tapes.



## **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

### **The study has several risks:**

I do not foresee any risks with this study other than the possibility that some topics may be uncomfortable to discuss. You will be asked for information such as your income, your parent's income, and your parent's involvement in your education. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

### **The benefits to participation are:**

The main benefit of the study lies in helping accurately document your life as a first-generation college student, a status that is rare, not only in America but globally as well. Some people may find that they are able to benefit from this study because they are given the opportunity to discuss matters that are important to them.

## **Compensation**

### **Compensation will not be provided for this study:**

Your participation is valuable and your time is appreciated. Your interview will contribute to a growing body of research that is seeking to better understand and improve the lives of first-generation college students. Unfortunately, compensation will not be provided but we hope that you will find the experience enjoyable.

## **Confidentiality**

- Only I (Brittany Ridge) and my advisor, Dr. Heather Johnson will have access to your transcripts.
- To protect your right to confidentiality, I will ensure that your tapes and transcripts are securely stored where only I have key access to them. Your name will not appear anywhere on the transcripts.
- Audio recording files from interviews will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer that will only be accessible to the original interviewer (Brittany Ridge) and Dr. Heather Johnson.
- Once the tapes have been transcribed, audio recordings will be destroyed.
- Any identifying information such as names, occupations or other potentially identifiable information will be omitted or changed in any sort of report we may publish.
- Names and information that could make it possible to identify you **will not** be shared with others, including but not limited to other participants, other students, and [REDACTED] **other than** my advisor for this project, Dr. Heather Johnson.

Dr. Heather Johnson will uphold all of your rights to confidentiality and will not share this information with others.

- The name of the institution will not appear in the research report or any publications.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

#### **Participation in this study is voluntary:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the [REDACTED]. If you do decide to participate in the study, you will still have the option to not answer specific questions. You are also free to end the interview at any point.

### **Contacts and Questions**

#### **The researcher conducting this study is:**

Brittany Ridge, Graduate Student Researcher, Department of Sociology, under the direction of Dr. Heather Beth Johnson, Associate Professor of Sociology. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Brittany Ridge at [REDACTED]. You may reach Dr. Johnson at [REDACTED].

#### **Questions or Concerns:**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact [REDACTED] of Lehigh University's Office of Research Integrity [REDACTED]. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(If minors are involved)*

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D: TABLES AND FIGURES

Figures

Figure 1: Independent Variables, Control Variables, and Relationship with the Dependent Variable

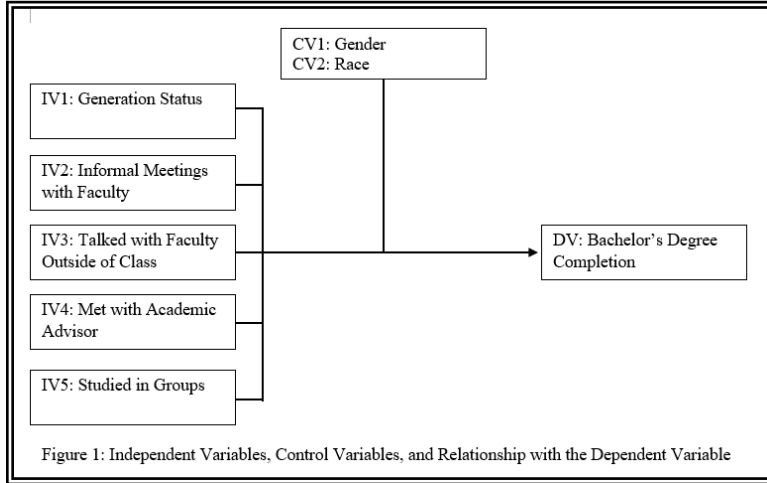


Figure 2: Frequency Students Met with Faculty and the Effect on Degree Attainment

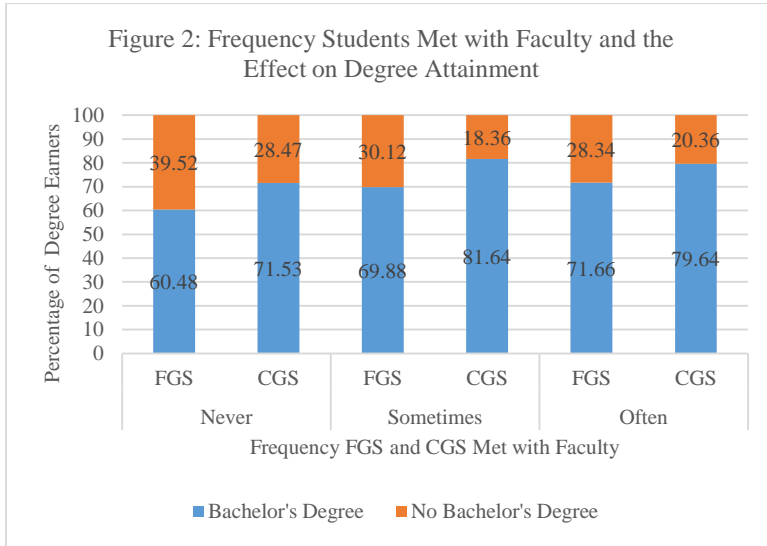


Figure 3: Frequency Students Talked to Faculty and the Effect on Degree Attainment

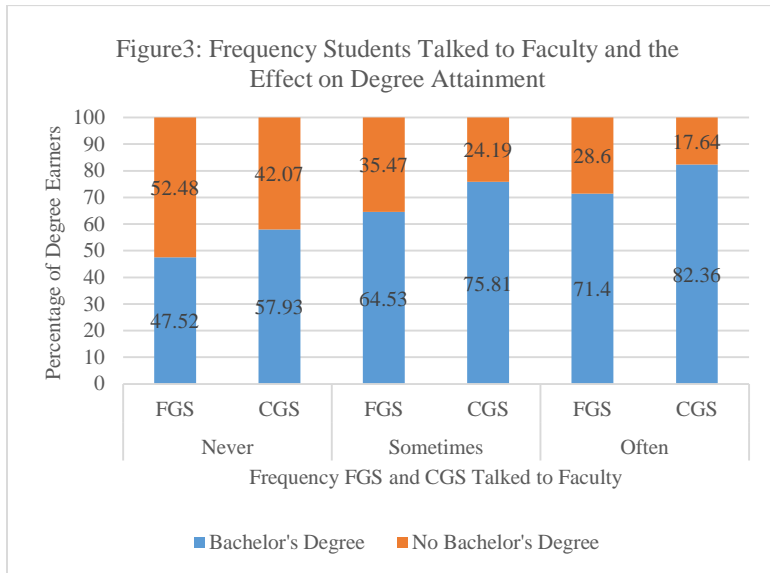


Figure 4: Frequency Students Met with Advisor and the Effect on Degree Attainment

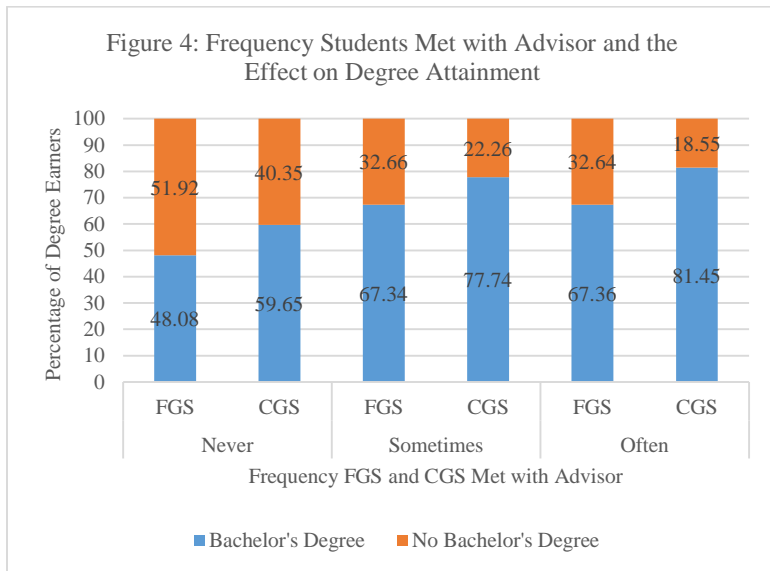
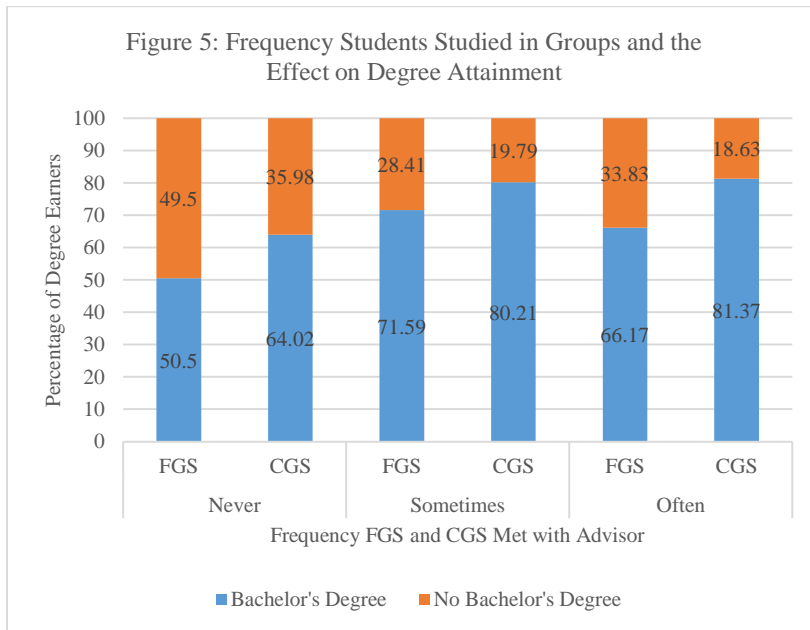


Figure 5: Frequency Students Studied in Groups and the Effect on Degree Attainment



*Tables*

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics	
Completed Bachelors in 09 %	71.81
Race %	
White	72.73
Black	8.5
Hispanic	7.78
Other	10.99
Gender %	
Male	42.81
Female	57.19
Met with Faculty 06 %	
Never	44.05
Sometimes	43.22
Often	12.73
Talked to Faculty 06 %	
Never	7.47
Sometimes	54.74
Often	37.79
Met with Academic Advisor 06 %	
Never	8.79
Sometimes	66.5
Often	24.71
Studied in Groups 06 %	
Never	21.76
Sometimes	59.26
Often	18.98
Generation Status %	
FGS	26.42
CGS	73.48

Table 2: Chi-Square Results of Degree Completion by Generation Status and Social Capital

Table 2: Chi-Square Results of Degree Completion by Generation Status and Social Capital						
		Bachelor's Degree				
		FGS		CGS		All Respondants
Completed Bachelors in 09 %		22.71	***	77.29	***	
Race %			***		***	***
	White	66.54		78.55		75.61
	Black	11.62		5.51		6.97
	Hispanic	10.68		5.18		6.4
	Other	11.15		10.77		11.01
Gender %			***		***	***
	Male	36.93		41.53		40.57
	Female	63.07		58.47		59.43
Met with Faculty 06 %			***		***	***
	Never	45.06		39.3		40.7
	Sometimes	42.33		47.07		45.92
	Often	12.61		13.63		13.38
Talked to Faculty 06 %			***		***	***
	Never	6.3		5.25		5.56
	Sometimes	54.94		53.45		53.76
	Often	38.76		41.29		40.68
Met with Academic Advisor 06%			***		***	***
	Never	7.06		6.58		6.72
	Sometimes	65.57		67.94		67.42
	Often	27.38		25.48		25.85
Studied in Groups 06 %			***		***	***
	Never	19		17.16		17.67
	Sometimes	64.25		61.83		62.33
	Often	16.75		21.01		20
Generation Status %						***
	FGS					22.71
	CGS					77.29

Table 3: Chi-Square Results of Social Capital Frequency by Generation Status and Degree Completion

Table 3: Chi-Square Results of Social Capital Frequency by Generation Status and Degree Completion													
		Met with Faculty			Talked to Faculty			Met with Academic Advisor			Studied in Groups 06 %		
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Never	Sometimes	Often	Never	Sometimes	Often	Never	Sometimes	Often
FGS Degree Completion					***			***			***		
	Bachelor's Degree %	60.48	69.88	71.66		47.52	64.53	71.4		48.08	67.34	67.36	50.5
	No Bachelor's Degree %	39.52	30.12	28.34		52.48	35.47	28.6		51.92	32.66	32.64	49.5
CGS Degree Completion					***			***			***		
	Bachelor's Degree %	71.53	81.64	79.64		57.93	75.81	82.36		59.65	77.74	81.45	64.02
	No Bachelor's Degree %	28.47	18.36	20.36		42.07	24.19	17.64		40.35	22.26	18.55	35.98



Table 4: Logistic Regression of Students' Social Capital and Bachelor's Degree Attainment

Table 4. Logistic Regression of Students' Social Capital and Bachelor's Degree Attainment								
	Full Sample						FGS	CGS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Generation Status (FGS as Ref.)	0.554*** (-9.66)	0.611*** (-7.63)	0.605*** (-7.77)	0.595*** (-8.03)	0.611*** (-7.57)	0.620*** (-7.25)		
Informal Meetings with Faculty (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes		1.718*** (8.57)				1.419*** (5.28)	1.358*** (2.55)	1.458*** (4.72)
Often		1.590*** (4.86)				1.153 (1.35)	1.316 (1.38)	1.095 (0.73)
Talked with Faculty (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes			2.122*** (7.36)			1.429*** (3.26)	1.355 (1.54)	1.46*** (2.88)
Often			2.989*** (10.15)			1.777*** (4.67)	1.728** (2.46)	1.808*** (4.01)
Met with Academic Advisor (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes				2.208*** (8.37)		1.655*** (5.03)	1.637*** (2.68)	1.644*** (4.16)
Often				2.606*** (8.93)		1.591*** (3.88)	1.27 (1.11)	1.76*** (3.91)
Studied in Groups (Never as Ref.)								
Sometimes					2.318*** (12.19)	1.936*** (9.17)	2.076*** (5.63)	1.885*** (7.30)
Often					2.329*** (9.32)	1.790*** (5.94)	1.583** (2.57)	1.889*** (5.39)
Gender (Male as Ref.)	1.442*** (6.48)	1.465*** (6.46)	1.372*** (5.32)	1.392*** (5.58)	1.4*** (5.65)	1.366*** (5.15)	1.331** (2.56)	1.375*** (4.40)
Race/ Ethnicity (White as Ref.)								
Black	0.532*** (-6.64)	0.525*** (-6.48)	0.531*** (-6.35)	0.522*** (-6.51)	0.516*** (-6.60)	0.523*** (-6.39)	0.621*** (-3.05)	0.476*** (-5.56)
Hispanic	0.534*** (-6.40)	0.527*** (-6.27)	0.548*** (-5.87)	0.543*** (-5.96)	0.517*** (-6.40)	0.540*** (-5.90)	0.784 (-1.44)	0.436*** (-6.30)
Other	0.887 (-1.32)	0.829** (-1.98)	0.859 (-1.60)	0.859 (-1.60)	0.828** (-1.99)	0.849* (-1.70)	1.152 (0.76)	0.752** (-2.53)
N	6,530	6,320	6,320	6,320	6,320	6,320	1,620	4,690
Pseudo R2	0.029	0.037	0.040	0.037	0.048	0.063	0.048	0.057
Note: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1. T-statistics in paranthesis								

VITA

**BRITTANY N. RIDGE**

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Pottsville, PA 17901

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Email: brittanynridge@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA  
**M.A. in Sociology** 2016  
Current Cumulative GPA 3.78 (as of May 2016)

Northern Arizona University  
**B.S. in Sociology** 2013  
Cumulative GPA 3.89, Magna Cum Laude Honors, Honors in Sociology

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Department of Sociology, Lehigh University  
**Teaching Assistantship** 2014-2016  
**Travel Grant, Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting** 2016  
**Summer Research Fellowship** 2015

Graduate Student Senate, Lehigh University  
**Travel Grant, Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting** 2016

Social Justice Scholars Group, Lehigh University  
**Social Justice Scholars Excellence in Research Award** 2015

Social Science Research Center, Lehigh University  
**Social Science Research Fellowship: Arizona Methods Workshop** 2015

Department of Sociology and Social Work, Northern Arizona University  
**Outstanding Sociology Student** 2013  
**Vicki K. Brown Memorial Scholarship** 2012

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Northern Arizona University  
**Wesley Brown Jr. Educational Scholarship** 2012

SPECIALIZATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATES

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Northern Arizona University  
**Law, Courts & Public Policy** 2013  
**Law Enforcement & Public Safety** 2013  
**Corrections & Social Control** 2013

Graduate Student Life, Lehigh University  
**Teacher Development Program, Level I**

**2014**

#### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

**Teaching Assistant in “Introduction to Sociology”**

**2014- 2016**

Facilitated a total of seven recitation sections, graded all writing assignments and exams, held appointments with students, and calculated final course grades.

#### RELATED EXPERIENCE

Northland Family Help Center, Flagstaff, AZ

**Community Educator**

**May 2012 – October 2012**

Established community and university networks, coordinated rape prevention and awareness activities, trained peer educators, and prevented rape and social inequalities through educational trainings.

**Peer Educator**

**December 2011 – May 2012**

Held educational trainings with students, faculty, and administrators at Northern Arizona University, coordinated university and community events, and produced marketing materials for awareness campaigns.

#### PUBLICATIONS

Ridge, Brittany N. 2016. “First-generation College Students’ Cultural and Social Capital: Activation, Management, and Acquisition at an Elite University.” Master’s Thesis, Lehigh University.

#### MEMBERSHIPS

**American Sociological Association**

Special Sections: Sociology of Education, Political Sociology, and Race, Class and Gender

**Eastern Sociological Society**

#### RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sociology of Education; Social Class & Social Mobility; Inequality & Marginality; Family