PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: THE IMPACT ON UNDERSERVED STUDENTS’
TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

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by

Jasmine Nicole Murphy

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Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Abstract

of

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: THE IMPACT ON UNDERSERVED STUDENTS’ TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Jasmine Nicole Murphy

Statement of Problem

The focus of this study is to examine parental involvement and the role it plays in increasing college enrollment, performance, and graduation and of historically underserved and underrepresented students. It will look at what ways cultural norms and/or expectations can impact the levels of parental involvement and how society at large defines and interprets the presence of parental involvement or the lack thereof. Additionally, it will examine in what ways cultural barriers inhibit an underrepresented student from pursuing higher education. The study will discuss the importance of parents of color having “college knowledge” and the understanding of college requirements and terms, as well as how to navigate the college preparation process, which can begin as early as middle school. The study will determine how low-income or minority parents’ knowledge of such college-related issues and navigation processes influence the rates at which their students apply to and enroll at four-year universities. Lastly, this paper will look at the impact that a parent’s level of education may have on a historically disadvantaged student’s desire to consider or actually pursue post-secondary
education. It seeks to determine if a parent has little or no college education, does that motivate or hinder a student of color in his or her desire to attend a college or university.

Sources of Data

The survey yielded 32 respondents, of which over 78% identified themselves as either a member of an underrepresented ethnic group or the first in their family to attend college. Nearly 95% of these students were enrolled full-time (12 or more units) and close to 82% were receiving some sort of financial assistance. All participants were Sacramento area residents, reporting graduation from a Sacramento area high school.

Conclusions Reached

Parental involvement, regardless of the definition, has an impact on underserved students’ transition into higher education. For many, it is positively related to a student’s persistence and belief in his/her own individual abilities. The data from students who participated in an early academic support program during high school showed that they were able to acquire a firmer comprehension of how the university works and what services are available to them to assist in academic, career and financial planning. Student respondents enrolled in EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar courses who responded to the survey showed a significantly high (<91%) agreement to statements centered on their skills and abilities needed to succeed at and graduate from a university.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Eugenia Cowan, Ph.D.

____________________
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am blessed and highly favored in all that I do and I know that it is with God’s grace that I have been able to complete this thesis. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Cowan, for always pushing me to ask, “so, what?” I have grown as a critical thinker and as a leader in this field. Thank you to Dr. Chavez for engaging my cohort and challenging us to become transitional leaders. Finally thank you to my mentor Dr. Beth Merritt Miller – thank you for introducing me to the field of higher education, and for your constant support, encouragement, and guidance through this process. You all are a part of my success and I thank you.
DEDICATION

I am rarely one hundred percent sure on anything, but I am absolutely certain that I could not have accomplished this goal without my family and close friends – my “network.”

Mom and Dad – Your tireless support and encouragement throughout this entire process is what kept me going. You are the wind beneath my wings and I am very blessed and honored to be your daughter.

Close Friends – Whether it was child care or candid conversation, you were always there for me and it is because of you that we celebrate this accomplishment together.

Aaliyah Divine – This entire process is dedicated to you. Never forget that you can and will achieve great things, even the largest of your dreams. Work hard, stay focused, and always be a leader. Oh and yes, “I am done with my homework now.”
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Each year in this country, the number of underserved students in the K-12 system continues to grow. In California specifically, the population of underrepresented ethnic groups (UEG) has begun to outnumber the non-UEG counterparts, becoming the first state in the nation with a “majority minority.” Economic disparities in certain areas of the state are having a malleable effect in the education of California’s socio-economically disadvantaged students. California ranks 45th among the 50 states in terms of graduation rates, and the state’s high school drop-out rates are over 40% in the African-American and Latino communities ("Community colleges offer," 2005). Students of color, from low-income families, and students who stand to be the first in their families to graduate, or even attend a four-year university, face extreme hurdles in their attempts to graduate from high school and transition into post-secondary education. Often times, they are attending high schools that too are underserved and the resources and access to information about colleges is limited. The achievement gap between UEGs and Non-UEGs is widening at an alarming rate. In an attempt to mitigate this issue, student academic support programs are providing resources to not only underserved students but to the parents of these students as well. Federally-funded programs such as TRIO and GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation) and local-level programs such as AT&T’s Road to College Tour are intervening and
showing promising results with students who are historically and/or educationally disadvantaged. Each of these programs, and many others like it, combine student support services with parental involvement and as a result of this type of early academic intervention, students in these programs are being accepted and enrolling into four-year universities at rates beyond current predictions. These program participants are enrolling in higher education and outperforming their peers at unprecedented rates (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). Parental involvement not only in a student’s education but a full commitment and participation in a student success program has a significant impact on these student’s high school graduation rates and transition.

Students from all backgrounds benefit from parent involvement. National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel stated,

Increasing parent involvement in middle and high schools can lead to higher student achievement, higher graduation rates, and more students admitted to colleges. Collaboration between parents, educators, students, and the community is the best way to ensure students meet the demands for higher education and the 21st century workforce. ("Keeping family-school-community connections." 2009, n.p.)

However, when disadvantaged youth are considered, parental involvement becomes one of the most critical factors. When income, academic services and socio-economic status (SES) is controlled, parental involvement in the college pursuit process, beginning as early as middle school, is the essential component to a UEG student’s college aspirations. Compounding on the necessity for parental involvement in the
college choice of these students, is the fact the lower socio-economic status African American and Latino families lack appropriate levels of “college knowledge” (McDonough, 1997; Vargas, 2004). McDonough and Vargas both defined “college knowledge” as a “pursuit of a bachelor’s degree that represents familiarity with the ways, purposes, and pathways that expose students and families to the social, psychological, economic, and experiential tools for accessing and achieving success in our higher education system” (Smith, 2009, p.176). These families have an increased need for supportive services and even more so a need for involvement in the program. There are a variety of factors that inhibit a parent from “actively” getting involved in their student’s pathway to higher education. Many lack the education themselves and feel intimidated by the process of assisting their student navigate the college preparation process. In addition, lower SES parents experience incongruence between their own home and work lives and what is considered the “norm” at the schools. Particularly, these parents will have service level jobs with work hours outside of the normal 8am-5pm setting. Activities and organizations for parents would then function outside of these hours providing a setting that would be identified as upper to middle-class standard. Many have not completed college and understanding and identifying with other adults who have often adds to the intimidation. Parents feel as though they cannot blend into the school setting as well as their student, and often shy away from participating in parental involvement activities at the school. As a result, schools see these parents as not having a desire to participate or be involved in their students’ education (Smith, 2008).
Research indicates that a lower SES parent’s educational level has a direct relationship with the level of their student’s educational attainment, as well as their attitude toward college (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). Often, these parents lack the knowledge and confidence critical to assist their student to search for and apply to four-year colleges and universities. This student population is typically placed on a less rigorous course path, outing them at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to the college application process, costs and timelines. Higher SES families have the resources (capital) to supplement their students’ education with personal tutoring services, anecdotal advice from family members, college visits and preparation programs during summer breaks (Schmidt, Shaw, Kobrin, & Packman, 2008).

Program administrators, as well as researchers, indicate that pre-collegiate outreach programs are most successful for underserved students and their families when there is a parent involvement component included. Because of the inherent disadvantages this group faces, partnering with the parents is essential, yet can be challenging. While it is argued that the level of parental involvement in these programs may be superficial because programs lack the time, staffing and funding to provide a more substantial level of family involvement (Tierney, 2002), a study by College Board in 1999 reported that nearly 70% of programs designed for historically disadvantaged students included a familial component (Perna, 2005). Nonetheless, there is a greater likelihood of underrepresented students aspiring to attend a four-year college, actually enrolling and doing so with higher grades when their parents have been involved in either a college access program or in a social network at the high school (Perna & Titus, 2005).
College aspirations and enrollment varies, at least in part, by racial/ethnic group. The degree to which parents can actively get involved in a student’s education highly depends on their level of education, understanding of the college-going process, as well as their physical, financial and social needs. These needs must be considered when evaluating a parent’s level of involvement as well as developing other college access programs with a parent component. Human, social and cultural capital combined give historically disadvantaged students the greatest rates of success when looking at high school graduation, college application and admission rates. All of these factors rely on the utilization of networks and the ways in which underrepresented minority families interact with the high schools and their student related to secondary and post-secondary education. Students from middle and upper-class families have higher capital and their access to multiple networks, also with a higher capital, is creating a substantial gap in achievement and college enrollment rates between UEGs and non-UEGs. Status, cultural knowledge, educational values, and language skills are common of cultural capital theory and parental programming and workshops grounded in this framework are positively related to a higher level of college aspiration amongst their students. The more a parent feels confident and welcomed in the academic discussions of their student, the higher the likelihood that these conversations continue at home between the parent/family and the student. As the definition of “family” changes, a consideration must be placed on the impact of siblings and older relatives on the UEG student to consider higher education as a viable option.
Statement of the Problem

The focus of this study is to examine parental involvement and the role it plays in increasing college enrollment, performance, and graduation and of historically underserved and underrepresented students. It will look at what ways cultural norms and/or expectations can impact the levels of parental involvement and how society at large defines and interprets the presence of parental involvement or the lack thereof. Additionally, it will examine in what ways cultural barriers inhibit an underrepresented student from pursuing higher education. The study will discuss the importance of parents of color having “college knowledge” and the understanding of college requirements and terms, as well as how to navigate the college preparation process, which can begin as early as middle school. The study will determine how low-income or minority parents’ knowledge of such college-related issues and navigation processes influence the rates at which their students apply to and enroll at four-year universities. Lastly, this paper will look at the impact that a parent’s level of education may have on an historically disadvantaged student’s desire to consider or actually pursue post-secondary education. It seeks to determine if a parent has little or no college education, does that motivate or hinder a student of color in his or her desire to attend a college or university. Specifically the research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college terms and requirements on a UEG student’s transition into higher education?
2. What, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school?
3. In what ways do cultural barriers inhibit UEG students from pursuing post-secondary education?

Definition of Terms

**Academic Success/Student Support programs** – Programs designed to assist underserved students/high schools with academic and college preparation services such as tutoring, workshops, college visits, parent workshops, etc. Used interchangeably with College Access program, Higher Education Access programs, College Preparation programs, Academic Support, Early Access programs.

**Achievement Gap** – Refers to the gap in performance scores and college transition rates between historically disadvantaged students and their White and Asian counterparts.

**Post-Secondary** – For the purpose of this research study refers to four-year colleges and universities. Although community colleges are integral part of the higher education system, particularly in California, this research focuses on underserved students’ transition into four-year institutions.

**Self-Ability** – A student’s belief in his or her own skills and talents necessary to succeed academically; self-esteem; self-confidence.

**Underrepresented Ethnic Group (UEG)** – Students from lower socio-economic families, potential first-generation college attendees/graduates, students of color, and students with disabilities are considered underrepresented for the purpose of this study. Used interchangeably with underserved, historically underserved, historically disadvantaged, underrepresented.
Significance of the Study

California’s underserved youth population is growing at an unprecedented rate. Family composition, educational level, and socio-economic background are some of the factors that are having a significant impact on the academic success of students in its communities. As the state continues to make cuts to educational funding, the achievement gap in performance between underrepresented ethnic groups and non-underrepresented ethnic groups continues to widen. If not addressed, the number of skilled workers set to fill the gap created by the retirement of the baby boomers will be insufficient to meet the needs and demands of California’s market. Many low income families also receive state subsidies. If the state does not place educational funding as a budgetary priority, the increase in demand for social and mental health services as well as the corrections system could push the state into an economic down spiral for many years to come. Student success programs are being implemented in historically underserved high schools to assist low-income, first-generation students to perform at higher academic levels and to consider college as an option. An integral component to exposing this population of students to higher education is simultaneously educating and empowering the families of the students to also encourage and assist their student transition into higher education. California must re-prioritize its funding strategies to allocate more resources to such programs. The number of high school drop-outs, teen pregnancies, arrests and death amongst underserved youth is alarming. Parents and students, as well as high schools and college transition programs must develop partnerships to foster the education
and transition of ninth through twelfth graders. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ("No child left," 2012) and a heightened focus on testing and the academic achievement of students, underserved students face steep odds. California’s budget appears to still have its worst days ahead. Historically disadvantaged students face their worst days ahead as well. Student success programs such as Upward Bound and Academic Talent Search do not have the resources to meet the demands of these youth. Similar programs must be developed at the grassroots level to supplement the federally and state-funded programs. The most successful programs are those that involve a parent/familial component. Before programs can be modeled after their current predecessors, developers of these programs should have an understanding of the family composition of the students they intend to serve. Research shows the more resourced and empowered parents become, the more likely their students are to consider attending and enrolling at a four-year university (Engle, 2010). Competing on an equal playing field involves a partnership among the families, the schools, and student support programs. In order for California to address the loss of the baby boomers in the workforce, underserved youth play a vital role in the economic sustainability of the state.

This study will enhance the knowledge and awareness of the impact of parental involvement on college transition, especially of historically disadvantaged student, and the necessity to engage these families in the college-going culture and processes. The well-known student success programs serving this population can no longer provide enough support to meet the increasing demand. New educational leaders and Student Affairs professionals can utilize the research codified here to develop programs and target
students/families much earlier in the education process. Colleges and universities in California have partnered with county offices of education to provide supportive services to students in as early as fifth grade. This research provides expansion on current knowledge on underrepresented students and their thoughts about higher education and the access and resources needed to support this group. California serves a large number of underserved students, with Latino students comprising more than half of all K-12 students (“California’s students,” 2012). The economic state of California looks bleak, and even more so for educational funding. What that means for underrepresented students of color is less resources and less college access services, but an increased focus on testing and academic performance in the classroom. Schools and programs cannot mitigate this epidemic alone. Parents and families of these students are increasingly becoming more vital to the entire educational process. From supporting their students academically to a holistic approach on what it means to attend a four-year university, reaching the families at the core and providing proven services such as tutoring, mentoring and testing assistance show impressive results in improving student achievement at all levels.

As the dynamics of the student population changes, educational leaders must be prepared to handle the unique challenges they present. Currently, California has the largest minority population in the country and the state’s K-12 children are just equally diverse. By researching how parental involvement may impact the success of this population, student services practitioners at all levels may be able to find ways to enhance to college transition of these students. There is a need for an increase in the
partnership between secondary schools, colleges and historically disadvantaged families. The achievement gap continues to widen, and without some mitigation, colleges and universities face an uphill battle both on the academic and on the financial side as they seek to remediate and prepare underserved students for college-level English and math courses. A proactive approach is needed to first understand the needs of underrepresented students, and then develop or enhance college access programs to meet these needs. Incorporating parents into this process is vital to their student’s success and often what is found to have the most substantial impact on their students’ academic performance and perceptions about higher education. Fostering partnerships with underserved families may provide insight on other areas of educational leadership such as mental health, self-identity and retention issues this population may face during college.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Following this section, Chapter 2 will be a review of related literature discussing the theoretical frameworks which support the need for this research as well as other contributors that are impacting the college transition rates of historically disadvantaged students. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology and data collection and analysis processes. The results of the survey are highlighted in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study along with conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research.
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

This chapter will provide an historical perspective on legislation that was passed that provided funding to support underserved students in the United States. It will introduce theoretical frameworks that provide a compelling foundation for the use of networks and the capital that such networks can provide to this unique student population. When parents are viewed as being involved, students gain certain capital which can provide a greater access to other networks to which they may not have been previously aware. The definition of involvement is central to this concept and will be further discussed in this chapter. The college transition rates of underserved (low-income, first-generation college-bound, underrepresented ethnic groups) students versus the rates of non-UEG students, commonly referred to as the achievement gap, provides insight on what researchers are projecting will be the ramifications of California’s widening gap at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

With continuous cuts to educational funding, declining resources is an ever-present issue facing the state’s K-12 system. The student population continues to grow and create unique challenges for educators; schools are faced with new ways to meet the state’s academic performance standards. This chapter will also explore what research is suggesting regarding a parent’s understanding of the college process, and their own level of education and what affect that may have on their student's desire and ability to pursue
higher education. It will focus on underserved students’ ability to not only consider higher education as a viable option, but at times to attend proper high schools that academically and psychologically prepare them for post-secondary education. This chapter includes a brief summary of Hossler’s (1987) College Choice model and how at each stage, parents and students must continue open dialogue about the college preparation and application process. Chapter 2 concludes with research surrounding culture and how certain expectations can inhibit UEG students from continuing their education after high school.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify what factors motivate low-income and first-generation first year students to pursue higher education. The research hopes to determine what components of academic support programs, specifically parental involvement, appear to have the greatest impact when UEG students are considering what route to pursue after high school. Specifically this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college terms and requirements on a UEG student’s transition into higher education?
2. What, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school?
3. In what ways do cultural expectations inhibit UEG students from pursuing post-secondary education?

The answers to the above questions are difficult to ascertain in quantitative format, but what it does hope to identify is that there are in fact specific components to
college access programs that can be reinforced and replicated in like programs. It does also aim to show that there is specific intervention needed at certain times during a student’s education that will have positive impacts on their later desire and pursuit of higher education. Lastly, understanding the cultural context in which UEG parents are involved in their student’s education is imperative to promoting post-secondary education for this population.

A Historical Perspective

The 1960s was a very idealistic time period in the United States. Racism and inequalities were rampant in nearly all segments of society. It was in 1964 after considerable lobbying and public protests, that the Civil Rights Act was signed by Congress, effectively opening public accommodations to African Americans. President Lyndon Baines Johnson served as President of the United States during this time period, and as a man who had put himself through college by working and student loans, was keen to the inequalities present in the higher education system of this country. The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) was also passed in 1964 and is responsible for the creation of Jobs Corps, work training, and loan incentives for hiring the unemployed. The following year, in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funneled $1 billion toward K-12 schools that had high populations of low-income students. ESEA spurred state governments to become more involved in education and helped pave the way for passage of the Higher Education Act (Cervantes, et. al, 2005).
The Higher Education Act of 1965 was signed to mitigate the financial pressures experienced by underserved students. There are large numbers of low income and first-generation college students come from backgrounds where the notion of financing a college education is equated with hardship, HEA created financial means for these students to overcome such barriers. From this act, Federal grants and programs, such as TRIO, were developed to close the educational gap being created in America. During the 1960s there was a certain understanding in society that higher education should only be for the wealthy, gifted and upper social classes. President Johnson wanted to change this attitude toward education. He stated once that the important role of the federal government is to somehow do something for the people who are “down and out,” and to this population is where its major energy in education should go. Through its Educational Opportunity Grants and early access programs, now known as “TRIO,” Part A of Title IV aimed to give these “down and out” students assistance in pursuing a college education (Cervantes, et. al., 2005). The same worries and pressures low-income families experience today were also very present in the 1960s.

In California, the first state with a majority “minority,” the economic and educational disparities among low income and first generation college bound students is becoming more of a growing concern each year. More than half of the students in California’s public school system are qualified for the federal free and reduced lunch program based on income and nearly a quarter of the students are English language learners (ELL). More than one in five children in the state live in poverty and on national and state standardized tests, African Americans, Latinos and low income
students are overrepresented among students scoring at the lowest levels ("The achievement gap," 2012).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law by former President George W. Bush in January of 2002, caused new difficulties for states, placing higher accountability on teachers’ performance and the academic success of their students. Taking no consideration for the cultural make-up of California, the new federal law further added much more pressure than other states because of its large non-English speaking student population. Low test scores are an important indicator of success in adulthood, specifically college degree attainment and job security.

There are many factors that contribute to California’s widening achievement gap. Cultural barriers and poverty are the most prominent. African American and Latino students are disproportionately represented in the lower SES. Students living in poverty typically have less access to vital resources such as health care, nutrition and safe places to live. They are often exposed to substance abuse and high crime communities. Many of these disadvantaged families receive public assistance, are single parent households where the parent has not received a college degree. It has been well researched that many non-UEG educators have lower academic expectations of students of color. Compiled with this factor is the complexities presented by UEG students’ perception of higher education. Many do not understand the cost-benefit of obtaining a degree value when looking at the sticker price of a financing a college education. There are “folk theories” prevalent in certain ethnic communities that instill the idea that no matter how hard an ethnic student works, they can never reap the rewards of a white student. Going
even further are the socio-cultural pressures UEG students feel to “fit in” and gain approval from their peers.

Researchers have attempted for decades now to identify causes for this phenomenon and what, if anything can be done to mitigate this concern. Allowing students of color to continue to fall into this achievement gap has negative long term ramifications for the state of California and the United States at large. Theories and models have been used to examine the causes for the academic performance and college persistence of underserved students. It has been posited that there are certain factors that greatly contribute to barriers students and families of color face when pursuing higher education

Introduction to Capital

Students who come from historically disadvantaged families do not have the ability to access the necessary networks, or in the case of this study, the capital that is typically associated with those of their higher SES counterparts. Research has shown that it is the attitudes that students develop as early as the seventh grade that determines the path to higher education that a student will choose (Enberg & Allen, 2010). There is a certain level of resources a student gains based on their family make up, the schools they attend and the peers in which they interact. These resources and access to such resources, referred to as capital, is highly dependent on the aforementioned three factors. Students and parents enhance their capital in a variety of ways, participating in extra-curricular activities, getting involved on the campus and interacting with those who have
the potential to add capital to areas which may be currently deficient. Underserved students do not have the same access to capital as their non-UEG counterparts. Students from upper and middle-class families are able to participate in summer enrichment programs, acquire private tutors and as a result are in constant contact with other adults with similar resources, or capital, thus a majority of these students become more academically and socially prepared for secondary and post-secondary education.

This section will discuss the different forms of capital researched by theorists such as Bordieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Lin (2001), and Perna and Titus (2005). Specifically, it will look at social, cultural, human and economic capital and how these brands of capital have far-reaching impacts on the college transition rates of underserved students. By gaining a variety of capital, historically disadvantaged students increase the likelihood of attending a college or university after high school. According to Capital Deficiency theory posited by Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer (2006), low income and UEG students are at a disadvantage when attempting to pursue higher education largely in part due to the disparity of how pertinent resources are allocated, and how this disparity may explain the gap between UEGs and non-UEGs enrollment at four-year post-secondary institutions across the country.

College choice, as introduced by Hossler (1987), focuses on the stages in which students, particularly those of underrepresented ethnic groups, make choices about what university they want and actually can attend after high school. Hossler identified a model that helped to explain the impact of parental involvement at each stage and how it
is important that students, parents and the high schools collaborate to ensure the success of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Lastly, this chapter concludes with a discussion around cultural and how cultural expectations can inhibit a student’s pursuit of post-secondary education. Ranging from cultural expectations based on gender to familial needs after high school graduation to how certain communities define academic success, culture does also play a role in the decision to apply to and enroll at a four-year college. Studies suggest that students find themselves at a crossroads when deciding between the cultural expectations of their family and society’s expectation for students after high school.

Capital

Bordieu (1986) focused particularly on the advantages some have because of the affiliation they have with certain networks. Bordieu further explains that the amount of capital a personal can gain depends of the amount of economic, cultural and social capital others within the network possess. The use of this capital keeps the dominant culture in the dominant position. The dominant culture creates a closed network and within that network, certain values, norms and beliefs are kept within that dominant network (Perna & Titus, 2005). It also works in the reverse; in effect, those without access, typically underserved families, are kept outside of the network and their access to information and resources about higher education remain extremely limited. The student must then make connections or venture outside of the networks created by family in order to gain knowledge or capital necessary to consider higher education as a viable option. There
are many underserved students who will, according to Perna and Titus (2005), seek out students or networks that are “better” than networks to which they currently have access. It is suggested that these relationships serve as a “bridge” to resources outside of their social and cultural networks. This capital can then be shared during parent-student discussions. However if the student is not able to gain access to such capital, the results are quite apparent for underserved students and not only the achievement gap, but also college enrollment rates.

*Cultural Capital*

There are a plethora of theories in the field associated with the level of familial and social support, in addition to community and its influence on students pursuing post-secondary education. Bordieu (1986) described cultural capital as a status-defining system of attributes – language, mannerisms, and knowledge – that are directly transmitted from one’s family. Although it has become an abstract theory by its very name, cultural capital theory has been used to help explain the importance of parental involvement, parental aspirations for the student, and understanding of college knowledge and involvement of cultural activities during a student’s formative years of schooling (Enberg & Allen, 2010).

*Social Capital*

There has been much conceptual overlap in the research on cultural and social capital, but more recently, social capital has received a considerably more attention and empirical literature which focuses on the importance of networks and connections with others that have access to other forms of capital. Social capital posits that the more
capital a person obtains, the higher the likelihood a student is to pursue post-secondary education. Perna and Titus (2005) demonstrated the importance of different types of parental involvement relationship and how with certain groups of underserved students it can impact the decision of two-year or four-year college enrollment. Researchers have also linked a student’s individual peer-group selection to the types of college knowledge a student gains during the college choice process and the importance it has on college attendance, specifically when discussing underserved students (Smith, 2009).

Social Capital is the investment into the relationships of people and how access to those networks can provide certain benefits that a person, or student or parent, can gain and use to his or her own advantage. Coleman (1988) focused on the transmission of social capital within and outside of the family. He highlighted how the transmission of such capital outside of the family, for underserved students, can provide access to knowledge and resources pertinent to the transition into post-secondary education after high school. What Bordieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Lin (2001) discovered is that a student’s college decision cannot be fully understood without understanding the type of high school a student attended, meaning the structural context. The structural context is defined as the types of social networks offered, resources available of level of parental involvement encouraged. Perna and Titus (2005) discovered that the level of parental involvement and college attainment of underserved students differs from that of other high school graduates. Developing a comprehensive conceptual model based on Bordieu (1988), Coleman (1988) and Lin (2001), Perna and Titus highlighted a link used to understand parental involvement as a form of social capital, and college attainment.
Social capital is necessary to gaining certain resources that would otherwise not be available whether due to low educational attainment of parents, declining resources in the high school, or other cultural inhibitors. Coleman (1988) explained two types of relationships critical to college attainment; the relationship between a student and his/her parent and the relation between the student’s parent and other adults, primarily those connected to the school that their student attends. The latter of the two relationships provides the capital essential for parents to understand the college-going process, which is increasingly important if the parent has not attended a college or university.

A comprehensive conceptual model for understanding the relationship between parental involvement, as a form of social capital, and college enrollment is needed. Like other forms of capital, social capital is a resource that students may draw upon as needed to enhance productivity (Coleman, 1988), facilitate upward mobility (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lamont & Lareau, 1988), and realize economic returns (Lin, 2001b). A primary function of social capital is to enable a student to gain access to human, cultural, and other forms of capital, as well as to institutional resources and support (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001b). Social capital is the gateway to access to the other types of capital that enhance underserved students’ transition to post-secondary education.

Economic Capital

The economic capital found among underserved students across the nation lends to understanding how access to certain high schools are linked to access to certain networks and ultimately certain information and resources about college enrollment. Economic capital, as its name implies, primarily is comprised of a student’s or family’s
income, accounts, assets, and other means of financing a college education. It also refers to the access to certain financial resources and education necessary to financing a college degree, including federal grant and scholarship programs available. Students from more affluent families have access to certain educational resources such as private schools and tutoring, while students from historically disadvantaged families find acquiring information about and applying for financial aid to be quite a daunting process (Enberg & Allen, 2011). The lack of resources and knowledge about the college application process in certain high schools may help to explain the disparities that exist in the college enrollment rates of underserved students (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). The connection between economic and social capital in the high school construct has been researched (Coleman 1988; Lin 1999) and what the outcomes suggest is educational attainment and social ties in part determine the levels of social capital available to a student and can lead to better informed educational choices of underserved students.

**Human Capital**

Human capital is the theory based on the understanding that the decision to attend college is based on the understanding of the benefits that an investment into education may have long-term. It is grounded in the understanding the value of investing into a college education and its long-term lifelong benefits, both monetary and non-monetary. Several researchers (Adelman 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa 2001; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010a, b; Hossler et al. 1989; Perna, 2000, 2004; Perna & Titus 2005;) have used different variables to show the investments students make in high school, such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, high Grade Point Average (GPA) and test scores,
have long term (i.e., college acceptance and career achievement) rewards (Enberg & Allen, 2011). In conjunction with economic capital, it is suggested that underserved families having a firm understanding of the resources that are available and the importance or early preparation, schools and families can build a partnership to begin to mitigate the issue of a widening achievement gap. This stride begins at home with the parent student interactive discussions about college aspirations. The model of college choice is a method at identifying steps pertinent to the college pursuit process of underrepresented ethnic students.

The Achievement Gap

There have been great strides on a national level to even the playing field for all students to have access to higher education. During the 1960s, former president Lyndon B. Johnson enacted educational reform for all Americans through his War on Poverty Campaign and Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965 created the largest pre-collegiate programming for underrepresented students (Reese, 2008). There is any number of reasons why high schools must work to foster not only the development of underrepresented students, but also their transition into post-secondary education. The literature suggests that students of color and those from the lower-socioeconomic status (SES) are not expected to perform at the same levels as their white and Asian counterparts by educators. They often underestimate the needs associated with being a first-generation, college-bound student.
Frequently, because of the two-tiered educational system that exists in America, underserved students receive a less rigorous curriculum than their peers (Reese, 2008). Recent statistics suggest that (a) students of color are attending colleges at 29.7% vs. 37.4% of Caucasians (Harvey, 2004); (b) students from upper-income families are seven times more likely than students from lower-socioeconomic statuses (SES) to obtain a bachelor’s degree by age 24 (Hoffman, 2003); and (c) 27% of first-generation students actually enroll at a four-year institution while 71% of students whose parents have bachelor’s degrees do so (Harvey, 2004). In California, underserved students are graduating high school at the second lowest rate in the country. Several factors may contribute: increasing Latino population, larger than average English-language learner population and the high school exit exam. According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education’s 2009 report, over a 20% gap exists in the high school graduation rates of white students and black and Hispanic students. In fact, it is estimated that $4.2B will be lost by dropouts from the class of 2008 in lost wages over their lifetime. The achievement gap is first noticeable in middle school math and English course grades, and these classes have become indicators of academic success at the high school level and beyond. Suburban schools more often have greater access to resources than urban schools and those students often outperform their urban peers in math and English (Camblin, 2003).
Declining Resources

There are a large number of underserved students who do not go on to attend a four-year university because they lack the resources needed to assist them in their transition. These resources included the type of high school they attend, the reduction in counselors and supportive staff, parents without college degrees, finances, etc. State budgets reduced education funding and the resources and services began disappearing from schools with the greatest need. Urban schools and those serving large underserved student populations faced bared the largest cuts. These schools often employ teachers, who either have limited professional training or have personal dispositions about race, ethnicity and SES, and make decisions about certain groups’ ability to learn, interest in learning and chances for success in college and beyond (Camblin, 2003). Often underserved students attending urban schools have previously attended urban middle schools. It is during this time that achievement is assessed and a student’s ability to succeed in high school is determined. The practice of assignment tracking or ability grouping shows devastating effects on underserved students. Assignment to different tracks affect the way a student view themselves and influences the amount of effort they will put into their schoolwork, the way they behave in class, and the extent of their achievement (Hoffer, 1993; Oakes, 1995; Tucker & Codding, 1998). Often the lower track classes are taught by instructors with the least amount of experience. Students typically work alone or complete worksheets versus in the higher track courses that utilize more technology and help students develop inquiry methods, problem solving, and
small group work skills. The higher track courses are often found in the more affluent schools (Hoffer, 1993).

When state budgets began to decline, counseling and college services took a large hit. College centers closed and resource technician positions were closed. Traditionally, California students' access to counselors varies by grade level, and 29 percent of California school districts have no counseling programs at all. When counseling programs exist, counselors are often asked to add administrative duties such as testing, supervising, and class scheduling. The ratio of students per counselor in this state averages 945 to 1, compared to the national average of 477 to 1, ranking California last in the nation (“Research on school,” 2010). The disproportionate ratios make it difficult for underrepresented students to develop college goals and navigate the college application process. Combined with the factor that many of these students come from homes where no one has attended a college or university. Research has shown that while African-American and Latino students comprise 32% of the college age population (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2006), only 18% of students at 4-year colleges and universities are African-American or Latino (Hawkins & Clinedinst). In addition, forty-eight percent of economically-disadvantaged students do not enroll in college following high school graduation as compared to 11% of their peers in the highest income quartile (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

There is literature on advocacy that suggests that the improvement in environmental school factors can improve the college going rates for students traditionally underrepresented in four year colleges. Counselors are in a unique position
to advocate for this population of students. Leaders in the field of education suggest that counselors must teach students how to help themselves, educate students and parents how to navigate college bureaucracies, and teach students and families how to access academic support on college campuses (House & Martin, 1998).

Parental Impact

First-generation college-bound students have become a focal point for discussions in the educational realm for the past decade. Increasing college going and completion rates for this group has been the focus of many state and federally funded programs. Nearly all of these programs include a parent component. Hossler and his colleagues (1999) found that strong encouragement and support from parents is the most significant factor affecting whether students aspire to and actually enroll in college. In twelfth grade, 53% of underrepresented students expect to receive a bachelor’s degree compared to 90% of their non-underrepresented peers. Unfortunately, first generation students report receiving less encouragement and support, and to some extent discouragement, from their parents to go to college (Horn & Nunez, 2000; Terenzini et al, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Students whose parents did not attend college need the most assistance. A 1992 longitudinal study of high school students noted,

Whether students received help in choosing a high school program was also related to their parents’ education. High school graduates whose parents had no postsecondary education were less likely than those whose parents had bachelor’s degrees or higher to report in 12th grade that they chose their high school program
with their parents’ help (34 versus 48 percent), and more likely to report that they chose it by themselves (28 versus 22 percent). (Horn & Nuñez, 2000, p. 16)

As funding continues to dissipate, parent involvement must continue to flourish if underserved students are to make strides to close the achievement gap. The implications of this student group continuing to perform at substandard rates are far reaching, not only for that particular student and his/her community but also for the state and the nation at large. California stands to gain nothing with a permanent second-class of citizens.

Several studies have shown that parents with little or no post-secondary education have students who achieve lower standardized test scores (Horn & Nuñez, 2000). In a state where test scores drive funding for schools and teacher bonuses, it is imperative that all students are performing. Those students who do not perform, typically historically disadvantaged students, are being marginalized and placed on academic tracks that often times leave these students unprepared to even apply to four-year institutions. While lower socio-economic parents, which are often those with a high school diploma or less, many report that they value a college education and have those same goals set for their students, they often times view a high school diploma as more of a realistic and practical option. Lower SES parents must have a grasp of college knowledge to assist their students in the college choice process, which begins with the predisposition and search phase (Hossler, 1999). In order for students to recognize post-secondary education as the next step, parents need the foundational knowledge to assist their students through the complex college application phase.
**Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is the critical factor during their student’s high school years. Low SES parents view involvement much different than their high SES counterparts, at times even if they are of the same ethnic group. Generally speaking, as defined by Anglo-American society, Latino and African-American parents in particular are viewed as less interested and involved in their high school student’s education. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was public policy and common practice for college preparation programs to primarily focus on the students, and the parents secondarily, at best. Black and Latino parents were viewed as “too disinterested and unsupportive to help; parents were problematized and summarily written off” (Smith, 2008). Because black and Latino parents were not involved per the common Anglo-American definitions, they were coined “abnormal,” and programs and college admission outreach practices became more student-centered. As more recent research revealed, when assessing parental involvement and taking a culturally sensitive and critical perspective, low SES black and Latino parents were viewed as “normal,” having similar interests and aspirations for their students (Smith, 2008). Now more than ever, parents of underserved students must be viewed as partners and incorporated into the college planning and application process. Many contemporary programs are already employing a parental component, many of which include a mandatory parent component. A paradigm shift is needed starting as early as the seventh grade, where students begin to develop and think about their place in the world of higher education. Assisting underserved parents navigate the college going process is quite an undertaking for any high school counseling staff, compiled with
cultural, social, and academic challenges faced by the student, these families must consider and be aware of a number of factors which contribute to students actually enrolling at a four-year institution.

_Perceptions of Affordability_

One key factor in the choice of higher education is affordability. Families from lower SES often times are unaware of the resources available to their student. It is often said by financial aid analysts that low-income students, minority students, and students who attend lower-cost institutions are loan-averse (Burdman, 2005). In the past few decades, there has been a dramatic shift from grant aid to loan programs. This suggests to historically disadvantaged students that they cannot attend college because of the preconceived notions of loans and indebtedness. Research suggests that many low-income high school students fail to even prepare for college because they feel higher education is too expensive and unaffordable for their families, and often times radically overestimate the cost of attending a university (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2008). Educators and financial aid administrators continue to work very diligently to dispel such myths. It is quite the opposite of underserved families’ perception of financial aid in that the lower a student’s estimated expected total family contribution (EFC), the greater and more robust the financial aid package.

_Access to College Preparation_

Many low SES families do not have the access to the same networks as their high SES counterparts and as such the lack of knowledge leads to fear and hesitation when encouraging their student to pursue education beyond high school. What remains
unclear is whether failing to prepare for college is a sound decision since many low SES students end up working low paying or part-time jobs. Due to a lack of financial education provided in high schools to both the student and the family, often times underserved students are not aware of the resources available to them. If the students attend an underserved high school or live in a disadvantaged community, it is likely that such college-going resources never make it to them. If the resources are provided in underserved schools, typically they are provided to the most academically prepared students, often those in Honors or Advanced Placement courses or the Achievement via Individual Determination (AVID) program. Many underserved students are not in the “right places” to gain access to the pertinent networks needed to understand and navigate college knowledge and requirements. Underserved students are frequently seen as not being academically “ready” to enter post-secondary education combined with the common misconception or misunderstanding of the concept of involvement, historically disadvantaged families are marginalized from the entire college-going process, sometimes starting as early as middle school. There are many early commitment programs across the nation that provides early financial aid packages to underserved students who are performing academically. Researchers believe that by removing the financial woes and worries, students will be able to focus and challenge themselves in the classroom. Surprising numbers of low income students – 850,000 a year, or 26 percent, according to the American Council on Education (2004) – do not apply for federal aid at all, even though they would likely qualify for Pell Grants. Programs that ensure parental involvement, address financial concerns, and prepare and support students academically,
like the TRIO programs, have made large gains in the number of underserved students prepared for and enrolling into four-year universities. In 1999, nearly one-third of all early college access programs had a required parent component (Perna & Swail, 2005). While students are the ones who must prepare academically and submit applications to meet deadlines, it is the parents who need the information in order to better assist their student. This college knowledge encompasses the academic preparation needed in the classroom, application deadlines, as well as what resources are available for parents and students while navigating what Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) coined the “college choice process.” At each phase of the process, parental education and involvement are central to assisting underserved students achieve their post-secondary goals.

College Choice

Parental involvement and the impact it has on students navigating the college application process has been studied since the 1970s and 1980s. Parents play an integral in the success of their students during the high school years and beyond. A parent’s own level of education, their understanding of college knowledge and the resources or capital to which they have access have been identified as some of the leading factors contributing to underserved students’ progression into post-secondary education, starting as early as middle school. Although parental involvement is vital to the success of all students, it is increasingly more critical to the success of many low SES and first-generation college-bound students. A lack of parental involvement from the working class and black and Latino communities has caused their children to miss out on
enrichment activities and enhanced college preparation programs (Smith, 2008). Parents of underserved students must engage, but also the ways in which mainstream society and educators are defining involvement must also take into account the cultural context and how its definition stacks against the definition of underserved families. Involvement is imperative that parents are involved as early as sixth grade.

College choice is the process whereby a student prepares, applies, and then enrolls in a college or university captured in a three-stage model which includes (a) predisposition, (b) search, and (c) choice (Smith, 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Predisposition is the initial stage of life through the end of middle school. It is during this time that students develop a disposition of habits about higher education. It is the time period of a student’s life where they are merely being introduced to the idea of post-secondary education, primarily by family and peers, and sometimes school personnel. It has been argued that this phase, as the title suggest, is predetermined by factors outside of the control of the student or his/her school. Primarily environmental factors, such as family and community influence a student’s decision to consider and pursue higher education (Freeman, 2005). The second phase of Hossler’s (1987) model of college choice is the search. During the search stage, primarily in the 9th and 10th grade, students are compiling lists of potential institutions that they may want to attend. In essence, students are creating a “choice set” of colleges. By the junior and senior year, students have entered the choice phase, where based on any number of self-identified search criteria, they will begin to narrow the list or choice set of universities down to realistic options. This narrowing may take place by considering location, size and many times
more importantly the cost to attend a particular college. It is, then, from this reduced choice set that students eventually select one institution that grants them admission (Smith, M.J., 2008).

Setting aspirations, providing encouragement, and active support are three broadly defined activities that capture parental involvement in college choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). They require action on the parents’ part such as financial preparation through savings accounts, discussing college prestige and acceptable distance from home with their students, and consistently engaging their students in conversations about post-high school plans while ensuring there is some congruence between the parent’s expectation and the student’s actual educational goals. Low SES parents must engage at their student’s campus, not only to get college information firsthand but to also develop networks and gain capital from other parents and adults at the school (Freeman, 2005). There are two branches of research pertaining to college search that are particularly relevant to low-income and first-generation college students. One of which has already been discussed previously, that underserved students lack the resources necessary to begin the college application process. Second, and more important, is the branch of research that implies that underserved students do not have the skills to create a realistic college choice set. Even high-achieving underserved students do not understand how to identify a range of colleges that meet their individual needs or one that is a “college match.” Urban low-income students often rely on information provided by friends and family, who typically come from similar networks with limited college information. This lack of college information further perpetuates the current trend of
historically disadvantaged students transitioning into large, public, two-year institutions (Kim & Schneider 2005; Person & Rosenbaum 2006). Furthermore, low-income students often constrain their college options due to other issues such as misunderstanding the net versus sticker price of college and how to conduct a college search (Roderick et al. 2008). The most astounding result is highly-qualified underserved students at highly unselective institutions of higher education. While there is no perfect path to obtaining a college degree, it is well known in the field of education that students have higher rates of bachelor degree completion when starting at four versus two-year colleges. Alon and Tienda (2005) found that students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds were more likely to obtain a four-year degree if they attended more selective four-year institutions, even if they were “overmatched” (that is, they exceeded the minimum qualifications to attend the institution), compared with similarly qualified students who attended less selective four-year institutions.

To further understand Hossler’s (1987) College Choice model, the context in which students are able to make effective decisions related to their path to higher education warrants discussion. The majority of urban high schools serving historically disadvantaged students in California, as one would imagine, are often underserved and under-resourced. The communication about college to students and parents is often infrequent and targeted toward student programs such as Achievement via Individual Determination (AVID), if such programs exist on the high school campus. Regardless of the population being served, according to Hill (2008), high schools can be placed into three distinct categories. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study
(NELS), Hill grouped high schools into separate types of college-linking strategies: traditional, clearinghouse, and brokering. Traditional and clearinghouse campuses are those that, in essence, provided resources to students to assist with the college application process, such as college visits, outreach to college representatives, and assistance with completing the actual college applications. Traditional and clearinghouse schools provided quite a bit of direct assistance to students, but failed to reach out and make a connection with parents. Brokering campus not only provided the critical college resources to the student, but also did “substantial outreach to parents” (Hill, 2008, p.182).

What is most disturbing, but slightly assumed, is the reality that the majority of brokering high schools do not serve underrepresented ethnic groups or students from low SES backgrounds. It appears the students and families with the greatest need unfortunately are continuously marginalized for the college preparation, search and application process.

In past years, high school guidance counselors were viewed by educators and families as the path students must travel in order to effectively make the transition from high school to a post-secondary institution. In the last fifteen years, Rosenbaum, Miller, and Krie (1996) provided a new perspective of the role of the guidance counselor. Access to higher education for all, especially in California, has diminished the responsibility of the guidance counselor to advise and assist students in navigation the college choice process conceptualized by Hossler and colleagues (1999). Students have the ability to attend almost any form of high education without much assistance from their high school. Colleges and universities have open enrollment policies, community colleges are highly unselective, and counselors are aware of this trend in higher
education. This equal access policy has allowed counselors to essentially remove themselves from college advising almost entirely (Roderick et al, 2008).

There are approaches in place to change the alarming rates of college enrollment rates amongst underserved students. Primarily, a change in thinking about the way students from underrepresented ethnic groups prepare, perceive and progress toward higher education. The way of thinking central to how parents of historically disadvantaged students are involved in their student’s education is also in need of reengineering. Schneider (2008) highlighted the basis for effective high school practice stating that schools, particularly in urban areas where many students are first-generation college bound, lies in creating academic climates and college-going cultures that fill in knowledge gaps and create strong norms for college attendance. Creating such a culture and filling knowledge gaps requires the high schools to promote and value practices that enhance college enrollment and preparation, starting as simply as educating students on what Conley (2007) coined “college knowledge.” This knowledge entails teaching students; primarily underserved students with limited amounts of capital, to understand college concepts like college talk and even how to apply to a university and the long term value of having a college education. For these students, much of the education would be facilitated by involving the parents. Many underserved students are often the first in their family to pursue a college education, so the pertinent steps the student must take to be compete for college admission, are not translated at home. Often, with some ethnic groups, the student is viewed as the primary source of college information. In homes where English is not the primarily language spoken, the responsibility of literally
translating college information to parents falls on the student. While the student is trying to understand the process, they must also serve as the conduit of information back to the family. This creates an immense amount of pressure on a student with many odds against them before they enter their senior year. Social and financial demands continue to discourage students of historically disadvantaged backgrounds, however, at times with those strains being equal to their non-UEG counterparts the cultural pressure to assume a certain role or place in society can cause great dissonance for students wanting to pursue a college degree. Research suggests congruence should be strived for and achieved by families, students and teachers and staff, to effectively promote the college transition of urban students. If all vested parties can agree that education is the best path for the student, the pressures some students feel to meet cultural demands often inhibit their preparation, application and enrollment to a four-year university.

Cultural Inhibitors

As this country becomes more and more diverse, the population of underrepresented ethnic groups continues to rise, with Latinos being the fastest growing group. According to newly released results from the 2010 United States Census, that number has increased to about 16.6%, including 1 in every 5 children in public schools nationwide (Devore, 2011). Latino youth are becoming a growing force in the nation’s public schools and this trend is even more prevalent in California. Projected that by 2025 Latinos will comprise 36.6% of the state’s population, California and other states must place a focus on the transition of high school seniors into post-secondary education.
As the bachelor degree becomes increasingly more critical to employment opportunities, students are enrolling into public four-year universities at a faster rate than in the last fifty years. In 1960, one out of every six people in the United States had a college degree – today that number is one in four (Rosso, 2011). However, although rates continue increase, there is an ever present gap among students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds and their white counterparts.

Although the number of Latinos enrolled in higher education continues to rise, it is still very disproportionate across the country. When looking specifically at California, while the Master Plan outlines the top 12.5% of all high school graduates be eligible for the University of California (UC) system, in 1996 only 3.5% of those students were Hispanic (Cooper, Cooper, Robert, Azmitia, Chavira, and Gullatt, 2002). The population of Latinos continues to rise, and while the growth of African-American and other minorities has remained consistent, the widening achievement gap is of growing concern to the field of higher education.

More than just language is posing a barrier to educational advancement. While a large population of Latino parents is English language learners, culture and cultural expectations are other variables worth considering. African-American parents, those of whom who do not possess a college degree, often times visualize the high school diploma as the ultimate achievement for their student. For many, attending a college or university is unfathomable. For many Latino families, the student is expected to work to help support the family. Students are placed in a difficult situation - deciding to pursue higher education of support the family. When presented with these two options, more
often school is placed on the back burner. Whether it is a misunderstanding of the net sticker price versus the actual value of the college degree or expectations for their student to enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation, UEG students are not graduating high school and enrolling into the university system at the same rates as their non-White peers.

Mentioned earlier was the notion that parental involvement plays a vital role in the academic success of underserved students. However, there is little focus on the cultural context of the definition of involvement. Perna and Titus (2005) further noted that “most approaches to parental involvement rely on a cultural deficit approach that emphasizes traditional forms of parental involvement without considering the ways in which the nature of parental involvement may vary across groups,” thus completely ignoring the cultural perspectives of parental involvement within Latino families (p. 491). For many Latino students, it is expected that they will support the financial security of the entire family. In 2001, more than half of Latino high school graduates enrolled in college, but two-thirds of 16-19 year olds were either employed or seeking employment (Constantine, Kindaichi, & Miville, 2007). Many low SES families are living in practical terms, in the “here and now” so to speak. It is difficult for those families to understand and pass on the value of a college education when a large number are working class themselves. Even those Latinos with a college education, foreign or native-born, find it challenging to transmit the benefits of education to their students in comparison to White parents (Rosso, 2011). Compiled on to pressures to assimilate, lack of personal educational experience, and discrimination, Hispanic students are
experiencing high levels of stress. Parents, with limited experience and at times personal and financial stresses of their own, lack the skills to assist their students navigate the college application process. This tends to lead to higher rates of drop out or enrollment at the community college where students perceive a more comfortable environment (Rosso, 2011).

The need for a comfortable environment is a result of the lack of support many underserved students experience in high school and during college counseling and advising. While counselors feel that because of the access to higher education students in California have available to them their role in college counseling is diminishing, many Latino students interpret this as a lack of support during this critical phase. Parents of underserved students are not involved as defined by the greater Anglo-society and, in their own regard, also handicapped to assist their student. As a result UEG students find themselves underprepared to route the college application and enrollment course. The lack of support felt by the students is often transmitted to the parents, and the level of discomfort about higher education surmounts. Many of these parents, low-income, are not able to make the financial investments early to prepare their student to meet the costs associated with a college degree (Rosso, 2011).

**Rationale for the Study**

Students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds are growing in numbers in the K-12 system in California. Latinos currently represent more than half of California’s elementary and secondary students. This trend is present across the entire country.
While these numbers continue to increase, there is a distinct underrepresentation of these students in colleges and universities in California, but also across the nation. Given the rate at which state funding for education is dissipating, combined with an increased focus on test scores and measurable academic achievement, UEG students and their families are failing to make the leap created by such a widening achievement gap. The research presented highlights a critical need for intervention for low-income and first-generation college bound students and parents.

There are a number of successful college support programs in existence, some funded at the federal and state level, and however these funds are becoming increasingly more limited as the federal government aims to manage the debt ceiling. Grassroots programs are springing up all across the nation, but the number of students they are able to serve is also limited, which in turn makes the highly sought after programs very competitive and at times out of reach for many other UEG students. Schools are being asked to do more for their students and families with fewer resources. This often marginalizes underrepresented students from the college going pipeline for a few reasons. The parents’ levels of education and college knowledge may create a dissonance between their reality and the messages surrounding the importance of a college education at their student’s school. When parents are involved, yet it does not match society’s conception of involvement, UEG students are again marginalized. This happens by the information and resources available, but also the limited access to the capital available when parental involvement in in agreement with society’s definition.
The literature points out two important concepts: Intervention is essential for low income and first-generation students to begin to close the achievement gap and involving UEG parents from a culturally sensitive perspective can further enhance UEG students’ desire and ability to consider higher education a viable path for their future. This research will add insight to the discussion involving underrepresented students’ enrollment at four-year universities and what are the critical steps that schools and families should take to increase the likelihood for this population to further their education beyond the high school diploma.

**Summary**

The academic achievement of underserved students has been a topic of discussion in this country since the 1960s. Congress authorized, and later reauthorized, acts to fund programs at colleges and universities serving low income and first-generation college students. Federal dollars have been used to create a variety of successful programs such as TRIO, which have increased the number of UEG students transitioning to and persisting at four-year institutions. College access programs provide historically disadvantaged students with information and resources essential to college preparation that is often absent in the high schools and in their homes. Many underserved students are the first in their family to pursue a college degree and the number of information networks vital to the college pathway is very limited. These students then possess less capital than their high SES counterparts. The lack of capital often leads to less preparation for college and if the student is not participating in an academic success
program, can lead contribute to achievement gap prevalent in the K-12 system in California.

California has continued to make substantial cuts to its public education system. Students of color and from low income backgrounds are achieving at lower rates than White and some Asian students, as schools are forced to eliminate after school programs and supplemental resources aimed to increase the academic achievement of these students. Low SES parents are not equipped to assist their student and many of these UEG families are marginalized from the college process. Parental involvement benefits all students regardless of background, but as UEG students are navigating the college preparation, parental involvement becomes a highly influential variable impacting the college transition rates. Hossler (1999) created the College Choice model which explains ways in which parents can encourage and promote higher education with their student starting in the ninth grade. Family composition and cultural expectations impact how UEG students view their educational future after high school. The definition of success for UEG students is equally as unique as their definition of involvement. For some cultures, the high school diploma is all that is expected before the student must enter the workforce and either support themselves or the family. For other cultures, gender can inhibit the academic persistence as students are expected to fulfill certain roles in the family or community. For most students the concept of a college degree is something desired and attained, but for most UEG students, several barriers often lie between their vision and their reality.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This quantitative research study aimed to understand the impact of parental involvement on underserved students’ decision to pursue higher education, specifically enrollment at a public four-year university in California. Parents play a vital role in the success of their student, but this role becomes increasingly more critical when dealing with historically disadvantaged students. By understanding the role of parents and the impact they have, it is the hope of the researcher to provide this information to educators that work directly with these students and families. The researcher also sought to identify ways in which parents can become more involved and how secondary and post-secondary institutions can collaborate to support the transition of low-income, first-generation, and/or students from underrepresented ethnic groups.

The high school graduation rates of socioeconomically disadvantaged students continue to decline, even as the rates of disadvantaged students passing the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) are increasing (“California high school,” 2012). Even more alarming are the enrollment rates into public universities in the state, with less than half of the high school graduates enrolling into some level of post-secondary education, many of which are at a California Community College.

There is a vast amount of research in the field that supports the concept that parental involvement, for any demographic, is beneficial to student success. What is
limited, however, is data on what components of parental involvement have the greatest impact, and if culture encourages or inhibits historically disadvantaged students from applying and enrolling at the university level. Research from students who participated in a college access program in high school and are now currently enrolled in their first year of college is also limited, but in the opinion of the researcher, vital to determining if such programs are effective and where, if necessary, can benefit from enhancements or improvements.

An analysis of the data collected from 32 first-year students enrolled at a public four-year university is presented from the quantitative study. This chapter will discuss the population and sample of the study, the design of the study, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

This quantitative research study aims to understand the impact of parental involvement on underserved students’ decision to pursue higher education, specifically enrollment at a public four-year university in California. Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a variety of statements centered on the parent’s level of education, impact of the program, the perception of the student’s own ability to attend a four-year college, student’s individual desire to pursue higher education, and the student’s level of college knowledge/awareness of college requirements and resources.
Setting of the Study

The setting of this study is a public four-year institution in one of the largest urban and most diverse cities in the state. The Liberal University (referred to as LU going forward) has a student population of approximately 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students who are involved in one of more than 100 fields of studies that include the areas of biological sciences, arts and humanities, and engineering. Located in Northern California, LU is one of 23 campuses and one of the largest campuses within the Liberal University system.

The admissions process at the institution includes a tripartite review process that includes specific high school courses (known as a-g courses), grades in these courses and test scores (SAT and ACT) and high school graduation. During the fall of 2011, LU had a 67% admittance rate. In addition, the 2011 incoming class had an average 3.23 grade point average and an average score of 1060 Critical Reading and Math scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test [SAT], resulting in nearly 60% of first-year students needing some form of Math and/or English remediation. The ethnic breakdown of LU undergraduate students is as follow: 40% White/Caucasian, 20% Asian, 18% Hispanic, 6% African-American, and 1% American Indian. More than 700 full time instructors maintain a faculty-to-student ratio of 26 to serve LU students. The faculty consists of 54% male and 46% female with 30% identifying as a person of color and 84% of the instructional staff with the highest degree in their field ("California state university," 2011).
Population and Sample

The population for this study was first-generation college students attending Liberal University. During the fall of 2011, Liberal University admitted 1791 minority students, with over 1000 identifying themselves as underrepresented in higher education, of which 2,616 enrolled into the one of LU’s academic support and retention programs ("The fall 2011," 2011).

The sample for this study was first-generation first year college students who are currently participating in one of the Federal TRIO programs (Educational Opportunity Program). After researching California public university’s special programs designed to assist underserved students at the post-secondary level, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) was selected as it serves low income and first-generation college students. Data from fifteen students who participated in an academic support program (AVID, Upward Bound, Academic Talent Search, Breakthrough, etc.) in high school is compared against that of seventeen non-program participants. Common among most academic support programs is one critical component - parental involvement. This sample, participants of such programs, provides a unique perspective on the impact of that distinct factor on their decision to pursue higher education.

The sample provided quantitative data collected from an electronic survey distributed via their student portal email account. The ability to gather data directly from the students not only enhanced this study but provided some genuine, in-depth insight on the real-life experiences of these students. The respondents to the survey resulted in a
relatively small sample size, and it is not intended that this will be representative of all underserved first-generation college students.

Design of the Study

The quantitative study aimed to highlight factors related to underrepresented students’ personal perception of higher education, parental involvement and its impact, and cultural barriers and/or expectations. The study seeks to understand to what degree certain variables impacted their decision to pursue a college education and where they chose to enroll. It was completed voluntarily and anonymously by first-year students enrolled at Liberal University (LU) during the 2011/2012 academic school year. The students were enrolled in an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Learning Community/Freshman Seminar course(s). All of the survey questions were closed-ended and multiple-choice. There were three initial questions posed to gain demographic information: underrepresented ethnic group identification, first-generation, and socioeconomic status.

The sample was fairly representative of historically disadvantaged students in California attending a public four-year university. However, this design may not be entirely representative of the complete population of underserved college students.
Data Collection

Participant selection began by soliciting participants from Learning Communities/Freshman Seminars created for students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). The sample selection process was facilitated in three steps. First, students were introduced to the purpose of the study. Second, students who fit the criteria for the study were identified. Lastly, data was used from those who completed the survey matching the specific criteria. The researcher contacted the Director of the EOP program for assistance in making contact with students who met the requirements of this study. An email (Appendix A) was sent to the students by LU’s Information Resources & Technology department through the university's message system. The email contained an introduction to the researcher, an explanation of the purpose of the survey, and the contributions of the survey towards the researchers study. It also contained an explanation of voluntary consent, a statement to assure anonymity of all voluntary participants, and contact information for the researcher. The email concluded with a link to access the survey on SurveyMonkey.

Twenty-one freshmen undergraduates completed the survey after one week. Seeking additional participants, the researcher resent the e-mail invitation to all first-year students enrolled in an EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar. From the subsequent email invitation, the researcher received eleven additional completed surveys. One final email invitation was sent one week before the close of the survey on April 13, 2012. No additional responses were received.

Instrumentation
In the spring of 2012, surveys were sent electronically to 278 first-year students enrolled in an EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar course. The Educational Opportunity Program serves California residents from low-income households who demonstrate the motivation and potential to earn a baccalaureate degree. First generation, historically low-income, educationally disadvantaged prospective freshmen & transfer students are eligible to apply. EOP students are individuals who have the potential to succeed but have not been able to realize their goal for a higher education because of her/his economic and/or educational background. All EOP applicants must meet the income guidelines listed below. The guidelines (Appendix C) are not intended to exclude disadvantaged students but to identify and give priority to the most financially needy applicants (“EOP admissions,” retrieved Mar. 22, 2012).

The survey was administered solely online, via the Internet. Students were asked to complete the survey on SurveyMonkey with a link and the consent form being attached to the email invitation. Participants received no reward or compensation for participation in the research. The research design stated that those who participated might not directly benefit from the research, but that the research could serve beneficial to future underserved students. The questions were designed to help the researcher uncover a better understanding of the needs of underserved students during the college choice model introduced by Hossler (1987), the effectiveness of early academic preparation programs and services in guiding these students through the college transition process, and the students’ perception of parental involvement during of high school. This study will help answer some of the questions associated with the low college transition rates of
historically disadvantaged students and their selection process as it relates to four-year institutions. There were 25 questions on the survey, taking no more than thirty minutes to complete. The research design allowed for no personal interaction with the students.

If students needed help or had questions regarding the survey or research in general, they could use the researcher's provided contact information for further support. Aside from this, the survey was designed to be user friendly while utilizing language both relevant to the field and comprehensible by first-year students. The survey questions were tested on two eighth graders from a local middle school, one male and one female.

The survey questions were focused on the following key areas:

1. The impact of the parent’s level of education.
2. The impact of the program.
3. The perception of the student’s own ability to attend a four-year college.
4. The student’s individual desire to pursue higher education.
5. The student’s level of college knowledge/awareness of college requirements and resources.

Questions 4 through 8 of the survey were designed in order to gauge parental involvement. Students were asked to rate the impact their parent’s involvement and education level had on their desire and persistence toward a college degree. Questions 10 through 13 were specifically geared towards students who participated in a college access or similar program. Since many of these programs incorporate a parent component and provide supplemental services, students were asked to identify how their involvement in such a program encouraged or hindered their ability to enroll at a university after high
school. Questions 14 through 17 asked survey respondents to describe their individual skills and talents in relation to the skills and talents necessary to complete a degree. While certain skills and talents are essential to the degree completion process, a certain level of desire is also critical to the retention and persistence needed every year to obtain a college education. Questions 18 through 21 encouraged respondents to self-reflect on their individual desire to pursue college. The last four questions of the survey, questions 22 through 25, were asked in order to determine what resources students were aware of on their campus. The level of awareness of such resources is critical to degree completion, especially for UEG students as they navigate what is often times unchartered territory.

After two weeks, 32 students completed the survey representing a 9% response rate for this sample. To review, the research questions were aimed to evaluate:

1. What are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college terms and requirements on a UEG student’s transition into higher education?
2. What, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school?

Research (“CALPADS finds statewide,” retrieved Jan. 22, 2012) has shown that both the high school graduation rates of socioeconomically disadvantaged students continue to decline, even as high school graduation rates are increasing in the state. Even more alarming are the enrollment rates into public universities in the state, with less than half of the high school graduates enrolling into some level of post-secondary education, many of which are at a California Community College.
There is a vast amount of research in the field that supports the concept that parental involvement, for any demographic, is beneficial to student success. What is limited, however, is data on what components of parental involvement have the greatest impact, and if culture encourages or inhibits historically disadvantaged students from applying and enrolling at the university level. Research from students who participated in a college access program in high school and are now currently enrolled in their first year of college is also limited, but in the opinion of the researcher, vital to determining if such programs are effective and where, if necessary, can benefit from enhancements or improvements.

An analysis of the data collected of 32 first-year students enrolled at a public four-year university is presented from the quantitative study. This chapter will discuss the population and sample of the study, the design of the study, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis Procedures

This study is intended to analyze and synthesize common themes regarding the experiences of first-generation college who have had some level of parental involvement during high school or via participation in a college access program. The researcher logged common ideas and categorized them based upon specific themes related to impact, both program and parental, individual student ability, and awareness of resources available to them at their university.
The data for this study was collected through the data collection system of SurveyMonkey. This data collection system allowed the researcher to ask the questions to the students, collect the responses, as well as analyze the data that was collected. SurveyMonkey collected, recorded, and summarized the results online, which facilitated the tracking of respondents and the viewing of results during the survey period. Once the respondents answered the questions, the results were saved in the researcher's account on the SurveyMonkey home page. At the end of the response period, the researcher was able to collect the survey results with responses for each individual respondent and a compilation of percentages of respondents answering each question for each of the different possible Likert-scale scores. The results, through charts and graphs, are highlighted in Chapter 4 in order to present the final results of the study to the reader.

Limitations of the Study

This research study focuses on first-year students enrolled in Educational Opportunity Program Learning Communities/Freshman Seminars at Sacramento State. From this sample, students who participated in an academic readiness program in high school were the primary target since most such programs require parental involvement. Because of the specific nature of this audience and survey, the results of this study may not be generalizable for all undergraduate students enrolled at other universities.

The researcher had the primary intention of reaching a larger segment of the first-generation undergraduate student population for this study above the 9% return rate. While 9% participation is not an acceptable return rate, results of the survey would have
been more insightful with greater participation. Although two separate email reminders were sent to the sample with the hopes of garnering more responses, the respondent pool remained virtually the same. Making the survey available for a longer period of time as well as advertising a final response date may have also created a more robust pool of respondents. Focus groups could have been used as well to gather additional data. Greenbaum (1997) suggested that, "researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth. Qualitative methods aim to make sense of, and interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (p. 120).

The addition of focus groups and/or open-ended survey questions would have provided the opportunity for the researcher to discuss cultural pressures or barriers first-year underserved students experienced during their transition into post-secondary education. Open-ended survey questions could have facilitated some insight on what cultural expectations or hindrances may be preventing numbers of historically disadvantaged students from enrolling in higher education institutions across the country.

Results of this survey are specific to first-year EOP students enrolled in EOP Learning Communities/Freshman Seminar courses at Liberal University. While traditional first-year undergraduate students may have similar experiences related to how parental involvement impacted them to consider and pursue higher education as a viable option for their future, the results of this survey may not be applicable to all students.

Lastly, as a first-generation college graduate and as a Student Affairs professional committed to access to higher education for the most underserved students as well as academic preparedness at the secondary education level, the researcher began this study
for both personal and professional reasons. As a new Student Affairs professional, the
researcher is becoming increasingly more aware of the academic challenges, concerns,
and successes of historically disadvantaged students and their experiences while
navigating California’s higher education system as they prepare for and enroll at
postsecondary institutions. This experience has prompted the timely investigation of
what factors contributed to the academic success of currently enrolled underserved
students.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify what, if any, impact parental involvement has on underserved first-year students’ pursuit of a college degree. It also aims to determine to what degree involvement in a college access program in high school motivated them to enroll at a university. Lastly, to what extent has such involvement in the program shaped their attitudes about their ability to succeed in college and awareness of academic resources. The research is focused on the following key areas:

1. The impact of the parent’s level of education.
2. The impact of the program.
3. The perception of the student’s own ability to attend a four-year college.
4. The student’s individual desire to pursue higher education.
5. The student’s level of college knowledge and resources.

Questions 4 through 8 of the survey were designed to gauge parental involvement and the parent’s education level, and what impact that had on their desire and persistence toward a college degree. Questions 10 through 13 were specifically geared towards students who participated in a college access or similar program, asking them to identify how their involvement the program encouraged (or hindered) their willingness to attend a university after high school. Questions 14 through 17 asked survey respondents’ to rate individual ability in relation to the abilities necessary to complete a degree. Questions 18
through 21 encouraged respondents to reflect on their individual desire to a college degree. The last four questions of the survey, questions 22 through 25, were asked to determine what resources students were aware of on their campus. The level of awareness of such resources is critical to degree completion, especially for UEG students.

These key areas aim to provide clarity and insight on the phenomenon of the lack of representation of historically disadvantaged students in the higher education systems of this country. More specifically, for the UEG students who have made the transition from high school to college, these key areas seek to answer these research questions:

1. What are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college terms and requirements on a UEG’s transition into higher education?

2. What, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school?

This chapter will analyze the results from the online survey categorized by key followed by a review of the findings. The aforementioned key areas guided the survey and are used to highlight certain components of the research questions. There results begin with a summary of the demographic of the student participants, particularly the nature of the program which gave them access to the survey. The evaluation is presented in order of the above key areas mentioned. This chapter ends with a discussion of the data.
Demographics

The sample for this study was taken from the population of approximately 24,000 undergraduate students enrolled at Liberal University (LU) during the 2011/2012 academic school year. The participants in this study were first-year students in their second semester of undergraduate course study. The survey for this study was provided to students enrolled at a public four-year university, Liberal University. These first-year students were enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Learning Community/Freshman Seminar courses. The sample size was 278 first-year EOP students, which consisted of both males and females. A large majority of the respondents (78.1%) identified themselves as a member of an underrepresented ethnic group (non-Caucasian). The sampling was not a true random sample as the students who participated did so voluntarily by completing the electronic survey and submitting it online.

Though the EOP Program is federally mandated that two-thirds of its students come from low income households with an annual income of $28,000 or less where neither parent has graduated from college, recent amendments have allowed for flexibility based on a student’s expected family contribution (EFC) as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The survey yielded 32 respondents, of which over 78% identified themselves as either a member of an underrepresented ethnic group or the first in their family to attend college. Nearly 95% of these students were enrolled full-time (12 or more units) and close to 82% were receiving some sort of financial assistance. All participants were Sacramento area residents, reporting graduation from a Sacramento area high school.
Survey Results

Respondent Demographics

Questions 1 through 3 were the only demographic questions asked on the survey. Students were prompted to indicate if he/she identified as a member of an underrepresented ethnic group, which by definition for this study was non-Caucasian. In response to this question, 78.1% of students replied “yes”, 18.8% said “no” and 6.3% “declined to state.” There were 78.1% of students responding “yes” and 21.9% “no” to being a first-generation college student. Lastly, the survey asked if the respondent came from a low income background, to which 87.5% answered “yes” and 12.5% answered “don’t know.”

Parents’ Levels of Education

There is much previously conducted research around the notion that parents are one of the single biggest contributors to the academic success of their student. This parental involvement becomes increasingly more vital for UEG students. At times, parents of underserved students experience some disconnect when attempting to assist their student navigate the college preparation and navigation process, since many have not attended college themselves. Often, this preparation and navigation is left to the student and the high school counseling staff. Parents who do not possess a college degree are less likely to have the necessary college knowledge to confidently assist their student search for and apply to universities. They often are not aware of the necessary courses,
application period, and university deadlines. There is the misconception that college is too expensive and outside of the financial grasp of most UEG families.

While some students viewed their parent’s level of education and/or understanding of the college going culture as a barrier, others see it is a motivator to become the first in their family to obtain a bachelor’s degree. When surveying respondents in this study, who also identified themselves as first-generation college students (78.1%), nearly 85% reported saying their parent’s level of education impacted their decision to pursue a four-year university. Almost half (46.2%) of these first-generation students also reported that although their parents did not volunteer at their high school, all (100%) of them said their parent or guardian pushed them to do their best in school. Many low SES families tend to have service level jobs or work hours outside of the traditional nine to five so they are often times unable to attend events related to the college navigation process. College fairs, school site council meetings, and at times, parent conferences are during these hours, and UEG families are in essence placed at a disadvantage, one could argue, because of the lack of a post-secondary education. Historically disadvantaged students, depending on the resources available at their middle and high schools, may have the opportunity to participate in an academic support program such as AVID, Breakthrough, the federally funded TRIO programs like Upward Bound and Talent Search, and many others. These programs have shown great results in the college transition and later success of many low-income and first-generation college bound students.
Impact of Program Involvement

These survey respondents were all enrolled in EOP at Liberal University. The Educational Opportunity Program provides several of the same services that many college access programs provide for high school students. Academic advising, personal counseling, and smaller learning communities or cohorts are just a few of the replicated resources for EOP students. TRiO programs and others like that have proven great results to assist UEG students transition, but research is limited surrounding the long term impacts of the program and the perceptions of the student participants who have now nearly completed their first year of collegiate studies.

Just over 46% of the total respondents stated that during high school they participated in an academic support program such as AVID, Breakthrough Sacramento, or a TRiO program. Of this 46% had a higher response rate when asked if their parents talked to them about college regularly when they were in high school. Almost twice as many students enrolled in a college access program “strongly agreed” compared to only 27.3% of those who were not enrolled in a like program. A large number of these programs have a parent component in which require some level of involvement ranging anywhere from parent volunteer hours at events to structured classes and workshops designed to educated parents about vital components of the college search process. These workshops are taught at convenient locations and hours, in multiple languages for English learners, and frequently involve the student, the parent, and the high school. These programs provide low SES families with some of the capital necessary for their student to compete with their high SES peers. This supplemental capital not only
encourages the parent but also empowers the student with the college knowledge needed to confidently pursue post-secondary education.

*Students’ Perception of Self-Ability to Attend a University*

Students are faced with an unprecedented number of factors influencing their decisions nearly every moment of the day. From television to smart phones, today’s students have become “plugged in” to a variety of different “channels” and the decision to consider higher education as a viable option is just one of those many channels that high school students are tuned into during the senior year. Family, peers and other adults in a student’s life tend to have the greatest impact on a how a student, often as early as the seventh grade, views the world of higher education and where they fit in this picture. Each of these groups has a unique impact on how students, and more specifically for this research study, underrepresented students, form ideas about whether they can attend and succeed at the collegiate level. As students move though their secondary years, peers and other adults become increasingly more vital to the college preparation and search process. For UEG students, it is during these years that social status becomes more apparent. The financial obligations required to attend, and at times even prepare to apply at a university become either a motivation or discouragement. For most, it is a discouragement as the realization of their current economic status becomes tangible factor for the first time in their adolescent life.

For underserved students provided the opportunity to participate in an early access program, the perceptions of a student’s individual ability to attend college is often positively related to the student’s participation in such a program. Respondents in this
survey, who reported having participated in an early access program during high school, stated that parental involvement was more of a factor on students’ self-awareness and ability. Of the students who were involved in a program during high school close to 64% of students said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that their parents talked to them regularly during high school about attending a college or university. They also reported that while more than a third (36.4%) of their parents did not volunteer at their high school, but 45.5% of their parents are in fact involved in their education. Respondents who did not participate in a program during high school related a different experience. When asked whether their parents talked to them regularly about college during high school, only 36.4% said they “agree” or “strongly agree” with that statement. This response can be attributed to any number of factors such as the parent’s level of education, experienced disconnect between the college going culture at the high school and the parent’s current socio-economic status, or a language barrier when English is the parent’s second language. Perhaps this lack of conversation about college perceived by the students who did not participate in a program during high school is the reason why 91% “agree” or “strongly agree” that their parents push them to do their best in school. These students without access to the resources that college access programs provide must strive to do the absolute best in school. The parents were the largest contributor to these students’ self-ability to transition to post-secondary education, even though they were not involved in a college access program during high school.

All of the student participants in this study were first-year college students enrolled at a public four-year university. These students have made the successful
transition from high school to college and have already begun to develop some thoughts about the skills and abilities needed to succeed at the university level. They have formulated ideas about where their skills and abilities fall on this scale and whether they have what it takes to obtain a college degree. For UEG students, family typically sets the foundation for educational expectations, and it is from here that students begin to self-reflect on their own individual abilities. Over time, these abilities are either validated or refuted by a student’s peers or other adults in their life, and has the potential to have long lasting effects. Students surveyed were asked if they have role models/mentors in their life who have obtained a college degree. The responses of program participants were disproportionate to those students who did not participate in a like program. Over 80% of program participants reported that their mentors/role models are in fact college graduates compared to just 45% of students who were not program participants in high school. When asked if other adults at their high school encouraged them to attend a four-year university, nearly three-quarter (72.7%) said they “strongly agree” with this statement in comparison to just under 64% of students who did not participate.

Students were asked to reflect on their self-ability to succeed at the college level. Those who were involved in a support program during high school showed virtually the same positive results as students who did not participate in a program when asked to identify their personal abilities. Questions 14 through 19 asked students whether they considered themselves “smart,” saw themselves as a college graduate, and whether their maximum effort in school was enough to achieve their goals. All 100% of respondents reported that they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with all statements. All students
believed that they have the skills and confidence necessary to continue their studies and eventually graduate from the university. Part of this self-affirmation may be related to the student’s enrollment in EOP and the additional services and resources provided to this student population. Academic advising, personal counseling, and financial aid workshops are just a few of the services that help to increase UEG students’ college knowledge and awareness of campus resources.

*Students’ Desire to Attend a University*

There were four questions designed to measure the survey respondents’ level of desire to pursue higher education. Although students may have the supportive services that typically are shown to enhance the likelihood of their academic success, without personal desire, the results may not yield the anticipated success rate. Students were asked if they wanted to be a college graduate; 100% of survey respondents were in agreement (90.6% “strongly agree,” 9.4% “agree”). Regardless of program participation in high school, the survey respondents possessed the desire to complete their degree and graduate from college. It is probable that this generation of students, once they see college as a viable option, truly understand the value of obtaining a college degree. For some, the degree represents education and financial freedom, while for others it may represent higher academic standards for the family as well as personal achievement.

Students were prompted to respond to whether they believed they would succeed in college. The data suggested that 96.9% of students “strongly agree” and “agree.” A large majority of survey respondents not only wanted to complete their degree program, but also believed that they would in fact succeed and reach that goal. Underrepresented
students need the additional support academically, but also on a social and psychological level. Students must first believe in themselves and envision a positive college experience. Adults have a unique influence on the self-esteem of adolescents, and the messages planted into students’ minds can and do have long lasting impacts. The last two questions aimed to determine what effect, if any, did other adults have on the student’s decision to consider post-secondary education. When asked if students have role models/mentors in their life who have graduated from college, the responses showed distinct differences between program participants and non-program participants. Nearly three-quarters (53.3% “strongly agree,” 20% “agree”) of program participants reported agreement while almost half of non-program participants disagreed (33.3% “disagree,” 8.3% “strongly disagree”). Many college access programs provide students with a mentor as a part of participation in the program. Many of respondents agreeing with this statement also showed positive results on the questions centered on self-ability to attend a university. Students, regardless of socioeconomic status and parental background benefit from positive adults in their life, and more importantly begin to formulate their own ideas about higher education merely by the presence of an educated adult role model/mentor. The final measure of students’ individual desire asked students to indicate whether other adults at their high school encouraged them to pursue a four-year university. Surprisingly, non-program participants showed a higher level of agreement (91.6%) than students who did participate in an academic support program (86.7%) during high school. Underserved students who do not receive supportive services from a program can face more challenges during their pursuit of a college degree. Even before applying to
colleges, students must be prepared academically to meet the demands of the preparation process which includes college preparatory classes and standardized tests. These students need additional encouragement and the data shows that these students, either under their own volition or encouraged at the high school, have successfully made connections with adults who motivated them to consider higher education.

_Students’ Level of College Knowledge and Resources_

Underrepresented students who come from low income backgrounds or are the first in their family to attend a college university, face several barriers before they enroll in their first college course. During the last twenty years, there has been a large push from all levels to provide access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students. Seeking to increase diversity, campuses across the state of California began partnering with local counties and school districts to provide early college access to these students and families sometimes as early as the sixth grade, which is the case for a local Sacramento area program known as College: Making it Happen!

During the last five years, universities across the state began discussions surrounding graduate rates and the prevalence of the achievement gap on their college campuses. Campuses were doing a fairly good job at increasing diversity within its applicant pool and campus enrollment, but a gap was very distinct between UEG and non-UEG students. For first generation and low income students, intentional and tailored services are needed to meet the additional barriers encountered by this population. Programs like EOP aim to not only support its students but to also empower them to
understand how the university operates and what resources are available to them on their
campus. It is vital for UEG students to receive constant support.

Of the survey respondents who reported participation in an academic support
program, more than half (54.5%) indicated that they “agree” that they have a firm
understanding of college language such as FAFSA, A-G, etc. Students who did not
participate in such a program (25%) said that they agree. The research points out
however that while this is true nearly 20% of both populations reported “neutral” which
may be interpreted as a disagreement with the survey question. Campuses provide a
variety of services to all its students; two of the most important are financial resources
and academic planning. Both components work together to enhance a student’s
likelihood of graduating within five years. The results in this study proved that
regardless students were involved in a program in high school, they “agree” or “strongly
agree” that are people on their campus who can help the select a major/career and that
they know how to apply for financial aid. All (100%) survey respondents reported
knowing how to apply to financial aid and the results were essentially identical when
students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement on academic
advising and career planning services on their campus, regardless of program
participation in high school.
Discussion

This study was formulated with the intention of gaining an understanding on what are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college language and requirements on a UEG’s transition into higher education and what, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school. Parents of underserved students typically do not have a firm understanding on the steps a student must take to prepare for and apply to colleges and universities. College fairs and other college related events often happen during times when low SES parents work or cannot find care for younger children. High school staff then sees the parents as not involved and it is the student who often times is left to navigate this process on their own. This is more often the case when the student is the first in their family to attend college.

Survey respondents were asked whether their parents’ level of education had any impact on their decision to pursue higher education if their parents talked to them about college regularly during their high school years and. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. While some students view their parents’ level of education and/or understanding of the college going culture as a barrier, others see it is a motivator to become the first in their family to obtain a bachelor’s degree. When surveying respondents in this study, who also identified themselves as first-generation college students (78.1%), nearly 85% reported saying their parents’ level of education impacted their decision to pursue a four-year university. Almost half (46.2%) of these first-generation students also reported that although their parents did not volunteer at their
high school, all (100%) of them said their parent or guardian pushed them to do their best in school. Many low SES families tend to have service level jobs or work hours outside of the traditional nine to five so they are often times unable to attend events related to the college navigation process. College fairs, school site council meetings, and at times, parent conferences are during these hours, and UEG families are in essence placed at a disadvantage, one could argue, because of the lack of a post-secondary education.

Historically disadvantaged students, depending on the resources available at their middle and high schools, may have the opportunity to participate in an academic support program such as AVID, Breakthrough, the federally funded TRIO programs like Upward Bound and Academic Talent Search, and many others. Underrepresented students who come from low income backgrounds or are the first in their family to attend a college university, face several barriers before they enroll in their first college course. During the last twenty years, there has been a large push from all levels to provide access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students. Seeking to increase diversity, campuses across the state of California began partnering with local counties and school districts to provide early college access to these students and families sometimes as early as the sixth grade, which is the case for a local collaborative program known as College: Making it Happen! These programs have shown great results in the college transition and later success of many low-income and first-generation college bound students.

These survey respondents were all enrolled in EOP at Liberal University. The Educational Opportunity Program provides several of the same services that many college access programs provide for high school students. Academic advising, personal
counseling, and smaller learning communities or cohorts are just a few of the replicated resources for EOP students.

Just over 46% of the total respondents stated that during high school they participated in an academic support program such as AVID, Breakthrough Sacramento, or a TRiO program. Of this, 46% had a higher response rate when asked if their parents talked to them about college regularly when they were in high school. Almost twice as many students enrolled in a college access program “strongly agreed” compared to only 27.3% of those who were not enrolled in a like program. A large number of these programs have a parent component in which require some level of involvement ranging anywhere from parent volunteer hours at events to structured classes and workshops designed to educated parents about vital components of the college search process. These workshops are taught at convenient locations and hours, in multiple languages for English learners, and frequently involve the student, the parent, and the high school. These programs provide low SES families with some of the capital necessary for their student to compete with their high SES peers. This supplemental capital not only encourages the parent but also empowers the student with the college knowledge needed to confidently pursue post-secondary education.

For underserved students provided the opportunity to participate in an early access program, the perceptions of a student’s individual ability to attend college is often positively related to the student’s participation in such a program. Respondents in this survey, who reported having participated in an early access program during high school, stated that parental involvement was more of a factor on students’ self-awareness and
ability. Of the students who were involved in a program during high school close to 64% of students said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that their parents talked to them regularly during high school about attending a college or university. They also reported that while more than a third (36.4%) of their parents did not volunteer at their high school, but 45.5% of their parents are in fact involved in their education. Respondents who did not participate in a program during high school related a different experience. When asked whether their parents talked to them regularly about college during high school, only 36.4% said they “agree” or “strongly agree” with that statement. This response can be attributed to any number of factors such as the parent’s level of education, experienced disconnect between the college going culture at the high school and the parent’s current socio-economic status, or a language barrier when English is the parent’s second language. Perhaps this lack of conversation about college perceived by the students who did not participate in a program during high school is the reason why 91% “agree” or “strongly agree” that their parents push them to do their best in school. These students without access to the resources that college access programs provide must strive to do the absolute best in school. The parents were the largest contributor to these students’ self-ability to transition to post-secondary education, even though they were not involved in a college access program during high school.
Figure 1  Parents’ Education Level

My parent’s/guardian’s level of education impacted my desire to attend college.
There has been much research on the impact parental involvement has on the college transition of historically disadvantaged students. Students from these backgrounds need additional support and encouragement throughout every step of the college search process. This support typically comes from the family, but when the family is not able, college access programs tend to stand in the gap for many of these students during their junior and senior years of high school. While more than two-thirds (68.8%) of students responding to the survey stated that their parents did not volunteer at their high school, over 40% indicated that their parents are involved in their education
(see Figure 3). The definition of parental involvement depends upon who is asked. Main society’s definition may not fit match the definition historically disadvantaged students have of involvement. Reported in Table 2 are the data responses from students reporting if their parents talked to them about college during high school.

Figure 3  
Parents Involved in Education

Parents and other adults have had a substantial impact of the successes of the student respondents in this study. There were reported discussions about college, and the fact that these students were to be the first in their family to attend college showed that it motivated students to pursue a college education. While many of the parents could not
actively volunteer at the high schools, almost 60% of students said that they do have role models/mentors who have graduated from college. Although many of the parents did not possess a college degree themselves, their students were able to identify with other adults who have gone through the process (see Figure 4).

All of the student participants in this study were first-year college students enrolled at a public four-year university. These students have made the successful transition from high school to college and have already begun to develop some thoughts about the skills and abilities needed to succeed at the university level. They have
formulated ideas about where their skills and abilities fall on this scale and whether they
have what it takes to obtain a college degree. For UEG students, family typically sets the
foundation for educational expectations, and it is from here that students begin to self-
reflect on their own individual abilities. Over time, these abilities are either validated or
refuted by a student’s peers or other adults in their life, and has the potential to have long
lasting effects. Students surveyed were asked if they have role models/mentors in their
life who have obtained a college degree. The responses of program participants were
disproportionate to those students who did not participate in a like program. Over 80% of
program participants reported that their mentors/role models are in fact college graduates
compared to just 45% of students who were not program participants in high school.
When asked if other adults at their high school encouraged them to attend a four-year
university, nearly three-quarter (72.7%) said they “strongly agree” with this statement in
comparison to just under 64% of students who did not participate.

Students were asked to reflect on their self-ability to succeed at the college level. Those
who were involved in a support program during high school showed virtually the
same positive results as students who did not participate in a program when asked to
identify their personal abilities. Questions 14 through 19 asked students whether they
considered themselves “smart,” saw themselves as a college graduate, and whether their
maximum effort in school was enough to achieve their goals. All 100% of respondents
reported that they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with all statements. All students
believed that they have the skills and confidence necessary to continue their studies and
eventually graduate from the university. Part of this self-afﬁrmation may be related to
the student’s enrollment in EOP and the additional services and resources provided to this student population. Academic advising, personal counseling, and financial aid workshops are just a few of the services that help to increase UEG students’ college knowledge and awareness of campus resources.

Figure 5 Applying for Financial Aid

Underrepresented students who come from low income backgrounds or are the first in their family to attend a college university, face several barriers before they enroll in their first college course. During the last twenty years, there has been a large push from all levels to provide access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students. Seeking to increase diversity, campuses across the state of California began
partnering with local counties and school districts to provide early college access to these students and families sometimes as early as the sixth grade, which is the case for a local Sacramento area program known as College: Making it Happen!

Of the survey respondents who reported participation in an academic support program, more than half (54.5%) indicated that they “agree” that they have a firm understanding of college language such as FAFSA, A-G, etc (Table 6). Students who did not participate in such a program (25%) said that they agree. The research points out however that while this is true nearly 20% of both populations reported “neutral” which may be interpreted as a disagreement with the survey question. Campuses provide a variety of services to all its students; two of the most important are financial resources and academic planning. Both components work together to enhance a student’s likelihood of graduating within five years. The results in this study proved that regardless students were involved in a program in high school, they “agree” or “strongly agree” that are people on their campus who can help the select a major/career and that they know how to apply for financial aid. All (100%) survey respondents reported knowing how to apply to financial aid and the results were essentially identical when students were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement on academic advising and career planning services on their campus, regardless of program participation in high school.
Summary of Findings

Parental involvement, regardless of the definition, has an impact on underserved students’ transition into higher education. For many, it is positively related to a student’s persistence and belief in his/her own individual abilities. The data from students who
participated in an early academic support program during high school showed that they were able to acquire a firmer comprehension of how the university works and what services are available to assist in academic, career and financial planning. These students also were able to find role models/mentors who were college graduates. These mentors positively influenced these UEG students to consider higher education as a viable option for their future. Student respondents enrolled in EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar courses who responded to the survey showed a significantly high (<91%) agreement to statements centered on their skills and abilities needed to succeed at and graduate from a university.
Chapter 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study, examining experiences related to the transition of historically disadvantaged first-year undergraduates into post-secondary education. The findings of the study were analyzed from the survey results of 32 first-year undergraduates enrolled in EOP at Liberal University. As more college access programs are being developed every year to continue to work with low-income and first-generation students it may prove beneficial to further explore this area to make a concerted effort increase the academic success of the state’s fast growing population and begin to work to close the achievement gap at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Recommendations in this area are further discussed later in this chapter.

This study was designed to provide insight on parental involvement and its’ impact on underserved students’ transition into post-secondary education. There are many hurdles first generation and low income students face when beginning the college preparation and application process, beginning as early as middle school. The five key areas used in this study are:

1. The impact of the parent’s level of education.
2. The impact of the program.
3. The perception of the student’s own ability to attend a four-year college.
4. The student’s individual desire to pursue higher education.
5. The student’s level of college knowledge and resources.

Understanding these aspects helped to guide the structure of the research. Each component has a unique and distinct impact on how these students made the successful transition and how they viewed themselves in relation to being able to complete not only their first year in college but also their individual degree programs. Students were asked to self-reflect on how involved their parents were in their education during high school and if their parents’ educational level impacted their desire to consider attending college.

In addition to these areas, the research study wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of a parent’s level of understanding of college terms and requirements on a UEG’s transition into higher education?

2. What, if any, impact does a parent’s level of involvement have on a student’s desire to attend a college or university after high school?

By surveying UEG students who are currently enrolled at a public four-year university, the researcher aimed to identify if certain aspects of parental involvement impacted their perceptions of their own ability and desire to pursue a college degree. The intent of the researcher was also to look at students who participated in a college access program where parental involvement is typically a required component and highlight student responses in relation to how the program specifically impacted their ability and decisions for educational options after high school. Students who were not enrolled in such a program provided some insight as to whether other adults in their life valued a
college degree and encouraged them to consider post-secondary education as a viable option for their future.

An analysis of the data collected by the researcher from the survey participants for this study is presented in this chapter. Perceptions of parental involvement, awareness of campus resources, and self-efficacy in relation to being an underserved student were all examined in the research. All data collected for this study was done through surveys given to students currently enrolled in an EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar Course at Liberal University in the 2012 spring semester. The target audience consisted of 278 currently enrolled first-year students of which the researcher was able to accurately gather responses from 32 students. Participants were invited to voluntarily respond to a survey administered through SurveyMonkey. All participants were given thirty days to access the online survey after which the web based survey was set to automatically close. Two reminder emails were sent to the sample group to garner additional responses, yet the number of replies remained virtually unchanged.

Conclusions

As noted throughout the study, first-generation and low income students face an uphill battle when preparing for post-secondary enrollment. Parents are the first to lay the foundational groundwork for educational expectations for their student. It is from there that students formulate their own aspirations about higher education, and by middle school, have already begun to see where they fit into this picture. However once they
enter ninth grade, when parental involvement becomes increasingly more critical, many underserved students are left to navigate the college choice process alone or with limited assistance from the high school counseling staff.

Academic support programs are sprouting up all over the state to attempt to mitigate the achievement gap that is not only prevalent in standardized test scores but also in the college transition of UEG and non-UEG students. Students enrolled in these programs have shown promising results in their academic achievement during high school but also in the performance and persistence toward a college degree. The more support first-generation and low income students receive, the more likely they are to succeed at both secondary and post-secondary educational levels. College access programs normally include a parent component where parents are also educated and informed on how they can assist their student during the junior and senior years. Workshops introduce simple college language and provide information about resources available to their student in college, such as financial aid and academic planning.

Students who participated in a college access program tended to show more positive responses when asked if their parents discussed attending college with them during high school (86.7% compared to 72.8% on non-program students), if their parents are involved in their education (20% of program students disagreed compared to 36.4% of non-program students) and if they have role models/mentors in their life who have graduated from college (73.3% of program agreed compared to 27.3% of non-program students). Most low SES parents have not graduated from college and are often times unfamiliar with the necessary steps their student must take before they can even begin
applying to universities. The college language used by high school counseling staff and college representatives is often times foreign to these parents. The parent’s level of education has an impact on underserved students’ transition into higher education (see Table 1). For the students surveyed in this study the results were positively related to students’ self-efficacy and belief in their own talents and abilities. Nearly 100% believed that they were smart and would become college graduates.

The students in this study are in the second semester of their first year of college, and their perceptions of their ability to succeed and complete their degree program are very encouraging. When asked to rate their self-efficacy, abilities and awareness of pertinent resources critical to retention and progression toward a degree, over 90% of all students indicated “agree” or “strongly agree” to all statements, and in some cases there was a 100% agreement rate. Historically disadvantaged students attributed making the college transition to parental involvement in some form, whether it was discussions about college or simply motivating and encouraging them to pursue an advanced degree.

Parental involvement must be viewed through a cultural construct when working with underserved students. The definition or perception of parental involvement will vary depending on who is asked to define it. The results from this survey show that the small things, and sometimes the intangible things, underserved parents do for their student can often have substantial impacts. At times, underserved students are able to gain a role model or other adult in their life who can reinforce the importance of attending college.

Once students enroll at a college or university in this country, federal privacy regulations prohibit college personnel from disclosing student information to third parties
without the consent of the student ("Family educational rights," 2011). For many students this means navigating an often complex university system consisting of advising, course registration, fee payments and deadlines, etc. Understanding how to steer through the appropriate lanes in order to enroll and begin courses at university for a student who may be the first in their family to attend college is often difficult. For these students, an academic support program like EOP provides students with supplemental resources to increase retention and progression toward degree completion. Over 90% of students responding to survey, who were now close to completing their first year reported to either “agree” or “strongly agree” that they had a firm understanding of college language and that they knew how to apply for financial aid (see Figure 5). For UEG students, having a firm understanding the culture and colloquialisms of the campus and how to obtain student aid resources to ease pressures are shown to have a positive impact on the self-efficacy of historically disadvantaged students.

Parental involvement, regardless of definition, has an impact on underserved students’ transition into higher education. For many, it is positively related to a student’s persistence and belief in his/her own individual abilities. The data from students who participated in an early academic support program during high school showed that they were able to acquire a firmer comprehension of how the university works and what services are available to the to assist in academic, career and financial planning. Students enrolled in EOP Learning Community/Freshman Seminar course who responded to the survey showed a significantly high (<91%) agreement to statements centered on their skills and abilities needed to succeed at and graduate from a university.
Recommendations

Colleges and universities in California are still faced with an ever widening achievement gap. County and local level academic preparation program are faced with an increasing demand and a shortage of funding. Colleges and universities are challenged with managing its current student population that early outreach programs are dwindling as the state subsidies also continue to recede to unprecedented levels. The Master Plan of Higher Education in California is in need of revisions as its promises to California students are no longer fiscally feasible.

Further research for this study would include focus groups or interviews. The opportunity to engage with the students on a more personable level may have produced more robust data. The live interaction can facilitate more of an open environment where the cultural context may be further explored. Working with a smaller more intentional cohort of students, perhaps one specific learning community/Freshman Seminar course over a longer period of time is another recommendation. This intentional interaction could increase the response rate, and while it still could not be representative of the entire population of underserved first-year college students, it may have provided a more in-depth insight as to how parental involvement, a parent’s level of understanding of college language, and culture impacts first-generation and low income students during their pursuit of higher education. At the conclusion of the study the researcher ponders whether parental involvement and participation in an academic support program will show the same positive results for first-year UEG students who were not enrolled in a
similar program in college. Further research can explore if these programs do in fact have long term effects on students or is continued reinforcement essential to the success and progress toward degree completion for historically disadvantaged students.
APPENDIX A

Consent Letter

Dear Student:

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Jasmine Murphy, a student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of the study is to examine student perspectives on how much, if any, parental involvement had on their decision to pursue higher education. You will be asked to indicate your level of agreement with 25 statements about your decision to pursue a college degree. The questionnaire may require up to 30 minutes of your time. If you agree to participate, you will either 1) receive a hard copy of the survey to complete, or 2) receive an email with an electronic version of the survey with this “Consent to Participate”.

Some of the items in the questionnaire may seem personal, but keep in mind you do not have to answer any question that you don’t want to. While there may or may not be personal insight to be gained from the process; it is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for all future students who wish to pursue a college degree. Additionally, it is the hope of the researcher to add valuable knowledge to the field for academic support programs aimed at supporting underserved students. All information collected will remain confidential. To preserve the confidentiality of participants, no identifying information will be collected, such as name, address, social security number, etc. The survey will be erased and/or deleted when data collection and analysis is complete. No compensation is offered for participating in this study. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Jasmine Murphy at (916) 400-xxxx or by e-mail at jasmine.murphy@csus.edu. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Thank you for considering this invitation to participate.

You may follow this link to the survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/whatmotivatedyou

Sincerely,

Jasmine Murphy
APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

Terms Defined:
Program – College transition program, academic support program
Support Programs – AVID, EOP, CAMP, TRIO (Upward Bound, Academic Talent Search, etc.)
College Language – terms such as First-Generation, A-G requirements, SAT/ACT, FAFSA, etc.
College/University – interchangeable, meaning a four-year public institution (non-vocational)


1. I consider myself to be a member of an underrepresented ethnic group.
2. I am the first person in my immediate family to attend a four-year university (first-generation college student).
3. I come from a low-income background.
4. My parent’s/guardian’s level of education impacted my desire to attend college
5. My parent(s)/guardian(s) talked to me regularly about attending college
6. My parent(s)/guardian(s) volunteered at my school
7. My parent(s)/guardian(s) are involved in my education
8. My parent(s)/guardian(s) push me to do my best in school
9. During high school, I participated in an academic preparation program (AVID, Upward Bound, Academic Talent Search, Breakthrough Sacramento, etc.)
10. Participating in this program has allowed me to see college as a real option for my future
11. Because of this program, I am more focused on my studies in college
12. This program is taught me skills that will help me succeed in college
13. This program is exposed me to many career possibilities
14. I know that I am smart
15. I know that I will graduate from college
16. If I try my best, I know that I can achieve my goals
17. I am a positive example for my friends, my family, and peers
18. I will be a college graduate
19. I believe I will succeed in college.
20. I have role models/mentors in my life who have graduated from a university
21. Adults at my high school encouraged me to go to a university
22. I have a firm understanding of college language
23. There are people at universities who can help me select a major/career
24. I know the admission requirements for at least one college/university
25. I know how to apply for financial aid
APPENDIX C
EOP Income Guidelines for 2012-2013

### 2012-2013 EOP Family Income Guidelines

#### Dependent Students

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#### Independent Students

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These guidelines reflect an income level that will generate an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of approximately $1,500. For purposes of these guidelines, the approximate contribution for dependent applicants is based solely on the parental income and does not take into account any parental assets nor does it assume any contribution from the applicant's income or assets. For independent applicants, the guidelines are based strictly on income with no consideration of available savings or other assets.

*Guidelines are based on the formulas used to determine the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) for federal student financial aid.*
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