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From High School to a Four-year Urban University: Understanding the Transition Experiences of Latina, Black, and White Female Working-Class Students

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FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO A FOUR-YEAR URBAN UNIVERSITY: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF LATINA, BLACK, AND WHITE FEMALE WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO A FOUR-YEAR URBAN UNIVERSITY:
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Under the Supervision of Professor Carol Colbeck

Working-class students' success in higher education is a growing concern for policymakers and administrators. Previous research has shown that working-class students experience less success in college than students who are of higher social classes (Lauff & Ingels, 2015; Walpole, 2007). This qualitative case study explored how the university environment and students' cultural wealth influenced success of Latina, Black, and White female working-class students during their transitions to college. Specifically, this study followed 12 students at a large urban public four-year university. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews three times before and during their first semester of college. The study is framed with a critical realist perspective using Schlossberg's transition model (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006) and Yosso's (2005) model of *community cultural wealth*. Analysis explored differences among participants' achievement of self-defined outcomes. Findings suggest that Latina, Black, and White working-class female students have *working-class cultural wealth* that drives their success. Participants were more successful in nurturing campus environments. Findings offer recommendations for practitioners to improve outcomes for working-class students and recommendations for future research that addresses working-class students' success.

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I lost you too soon. You taught me how to craft an argument and question everything.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION OF INQUIRY

I studied the experiences of Latina, Black, and White female working-class college students to identify ways to increase their success (e.g., attainment of educational objectives such as gaining skills, knowledge, or graduating). In this chapter, I describe the problem of class, race and ethnicity, and gender inequity in higher education and offer evidence to support why my study is needed. I then state the research questions that guided my inquiry and share the significance of researching students' perspectives and experiences to address equity issues in higher education. I end this chapter with central concepts and terms and an overview of this study.

My inquiry was guided by the philosophical position of critical realism, which establishes that an objective reality exists and peoples' perspectives are real; however, people cannot fully understand objective reality. People may develop closer understanding of objective reality by having shifts in perspectives. Accordingly, the essence of my inquiry is to bring new insight on the perspectives and experiences of Latina, Black, and White female working-class students.

Research Problem

Students of different races and ethnicities, genders, and social classes experience unequal success in higher education (Allen, 2011; Cole & Espinosa, 2008; Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016). Furthermore, insufficient research exists on the experiences of students from different socio-demographic (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, income, education, age) backgrounds (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reason, 2003; Tinto, 2006-2007; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Walpole, 2007).

Social Class Inequities

Many students who are of working-class, (a construct typically defined by low family

income, parents who do not have bachelor's degrees, and/or parents who have low status occupations) are less successful in college than students who are of middle and upper-classes (Lauff & Ingels, 2015; Walpole, 2007). The Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 followed a nationally representative sample of high school sophomores for ten years and found that, in 2012, only 14% of students with low socioeconomic status (SES) earned a bachelor's degree compared to 60% of students with high SES (Lauff & Ingels, 2015). When examining only income, Mortenson (2007) found that only 12% of students with low-incomes graduated within six years compared to 73% of high income students.

Despite years of policies aimed at increasing working-class students' access to higher education, a substantial gap in educational outcomes continues to persist among social classes (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Karabel & Astin, 1975). Mitchem and Mortenson (2016) analyzed graduation rates from the U.S. Department of Education's High School and Beyond Study of 1980 and Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and found that the gap between working-class and upper-class students who earned bachelor's degrees remained relatively unchanged at 45%.

Inequity in higher education is increasing. Mitchem and Mortenson (2016) looked at population data from the U.S. Census Bureau and found that, in 2014, the bottom two income quartiles accounted for 23% of students who earned bachelor's degrees; whereas, in 1970, they accounted for 28%. Although the percentage of working-class students enrolled in institutions of higher education has increased since 1970, working-class students account for a lower percentage of all degrees earned, meaning that they are more likely to drop out (Astin & Osequera, 2004; Lauff & Ingels, 2015; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Working-class students who leave college before earning a degree often have much more debt than when they started (Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016). Gains in working-class students' access to higher

education without mechanisms to ensure their success can increase social stratification, exacerbating inequity (Astin & Oseguera, 2004).

Race and Ethnicity, Class, and Gender

College students of historically underrepresented races and ethnicities are more likely to be of working-class (Douglas & Thomson, 2012; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2007). Peña, Bensimon, and Colyar (2006) stressed that "Not only do African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have lower graduation rates than Whites and Asian Americans, they also experience inequalities in just about every indicator of academic success" (p. 48). In the United States, students of historically underrepresented races and ethnicities (African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students who identify as Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) continue to persist (continuously enroll in higher education) and graduate at lower rates than their White peers (Museus & Neville, 2012; Ross et al., 2012). Furthermore, Lamont, Small, and Harding (2010) explained that individuals with low-incomes use many strategies to manage hardship and deprivation of resources; however, these strategies differ greatly between cultures.

In addition to race and ethnic differences, working-class females and males experience college differently with regards to marriage, children, family responsibilities, discrimination, and safety among other factors (Allen, 2011). Although women have higher enrollment and graduation rates than men, men still retain many advantages as they are more likely to attend highly selective institutions, select more lucrative majors, earn more doctoral and professional degrees, and succeed in more lucrative fields (Allen, 2011; St. John, Hu, Simmons, & Musoba, 2001; Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000). Furthermore, lower-class females are less likely than males to maintain continuous enrollment (Paulsen & St. John, 2002).

Strategies to Address Inequity

University administrators have tried to address inequity by developing programs and services designed to increase student success. However, gains have been minimal as students still experience inequitable outcomes as illustrated above. McCormick, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2013) and Museus, Ledesma, and Parker (2015) have asserted that many strategies for increasing student success are constructed from theories based on research with mostly White, male middle and upper middle-class, traditional aged college students such as Astin's (1984/1999) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory on college student departure. Thus, strategies largely ignore working-class challenges of limited finances and time, outside commitments, and campus climate (Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015; Walpole, 2003).

Researchers who have focused on working-class students have found that lower levels of student success can be attributed to low family income, low involvement on campus, and low academic preparation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found, however, in their review of over three decades of research, that most studies that look at student retention (enrollment at the same institution year after year) as a measure of student success only focus on a few factors leading to a "partial picture of the forces at work" (p. 630). Furthermore, Walpole (2003) indicated, "Higher education scholars often control for social class differences rather than focusing on how those differences may shape students' experiences and outcomes" (p. 46). Thus, new approaches for addressing social class inequity are necessary.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have indicated that student success is conditional based on several student characteristics and experiences. Yet, Tinto (2006-2007) shared that higher education researchers have come to recognize the difficulty in finding actionable implications for students based on race, ethnicity, and gender because of within group variance. Thus,

interventions and further research must target the students' specific socio-demographic needs (Quaye & Harper, 2015; Reason, 2003; Tinto, 2006-2007).

Furthermore, Terenzini and Reason (2005) found that most studies do not consider how the university culture and climate influence students' success. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have suggested that campus climate likely has subtle effects. Yet, research on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) has offered evidence to support that institutional environments affect students' success (Laden, Milem, & Crowson, 2000). Similarly prepared working-class Black students who attend HBCUs are more successful than working-class Black students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) with regards to writing and scientific reasoning (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996), and degree completion (Allen, 1992; Ehrenberg & Rothstein, 1993; Perna et al., 2006). Furthermore, Hurtado at al. (2007) found that students' sense of belonging, their sense of how valued they feel at the institution, is related to their perceptions of the campus culture and climate and influences their adjustment during their first year in school. Kezar et al. (2015) specifically has called for an examination of institutional culture and climate to address student engagement for low-income students.

Purpose of Study

This study meets these calls for additional research. The transition to college (the first year of college enrollment) marks when students initially experience the university culture and climate. Thus, this period serves as a prime opportunity to understand how working-class students experience the university culture and climate and, furthermore, what working-class students draw on during their experience. For example, Terenzini et al. (1994) conducted a multi-institutional qualitative study on 132 students' transition experiences and found that first-

generation students (for whom neither parent has earned a four-year degree) transition differently than their peers. First-generation students focused almost solely on academics and, consequently, did not get as involved in campus activities as middle and upper-class students. Furthermore, transition experiences are particularly important to promoting success as many students do not persist after their first year in college (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). Terenzini et al. (1994) Carter, Locks, and Winkle-Wagner (2013) specifically have called for researchers to focus on college transition experiences of students of diverse backgrounds with considerations for intersectional identities including class, race, ethnicity, and gender among others to increase students' success.

Urban four-year public universities serve as key locations to conduct research that seeks to understand the experiences of students who have multiple identities associated with inequity since they often serve more racially and ethnically diverse working-class students than other types of four-year institutions (Franklin, 2013; Hovart & Shaw, 1999; Mundt, 1998). Furthermore, urban universities often play substantial roles in their communities by educating residents, engaging in research, and fostering economic development (Franklin, 2013; Hovart & Shaw, 1999; Mundt, 1998). Thus, they have direct opportunities to improve equitable outcomes for working-class students.

This study meets calls for additional research as I sought to understand the experiences of Latina, Black, and White working-class female students by exploring, in depth, their transitions to college spanning from the summer before they began college through their first semester at a four-year urban public university.

Research Question

I examined what students drew on during their transitions and how they experienced

college–including the culture and climate. Specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

(1) How do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experience the campus culture and climate during their transition from high school to a large urban four-year public university?

(2) What do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students draw on to navigate the transition from high school to a large urban four-year public university?

(3) How do these factors (what students draw on and the campus culture and climate) influence their success during their first semester of college?

(4) What differences, if any, are there among the transition experiences of working-class female students based on race or ethnicity?

Significance

Working-class Latina, Black, White, and female students may have strengths that have been unrecognized or undervalued in higher education. Yosso (2005) has created the concept *community cultural wealth* to highlight the often unrecognized or undervalued strengths of students who do not identify with the majority culture of the institution. This study provides empirical evidence that supports Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth. Furthermore, I uncovered students' experiences and perspectives that have been unexamined and/or not espoused in higher education. By understanding students' perspectives, university administrators and policymakers may develop ways to harness students' strengths and increase their success. This research can help university administrators strategically shift the university culture and climate to incorporate working-class students' knowledge and, perhaps, increase success for all students.

This study is particularly significant because I accounted for students' multiple identities. Each identity classification (class, gender, and race and ethnicity) is associated with its own unique historically rooted relationship with structural inequities. Furthermore, identities are simultaneously experienced. Thus, working-class female students of one race or ethnicity may transition to college differently than working-class female students of another race or ethnicity.

Research that does not adequately address social class and race and ethnicity leaves room for people to conflate these constructs. For example, many studies have found that students of color are less likely to persist than White students (Ross et al., 2012). However, when data are controlled for class, Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that working-class students of color persist at higher rates than working-class White students. Paulsen and St. John (2002) also found that working-class women were less likely to persist than working-class men. These findings illustrate the importance of accounting for multiple identities.

I have found no other qualitative study that focuses on undergraduate female working-class college students that has adequate representation of women from different races and ethnicities. I have, however, found qualitative studies on college students' transitions that focus on students of the same race or ethnicity (Baber, 2012; Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner; 2014; McCoy, 2014; Zhang & Smith, 2011), students from the same high school (Keup, 2007), male students (Wilkins, 2014), and community college students (Weissman, Bulakowski, & Jumisko, 1998). I also found studies that did not address race or ethnicity (O'Shea 2015) or have adequate representation of race or ethnicity (Jehangir, 2010; Nuñez, 2005). In particular, Nuñez (2005) conducted a qualitative study on racially and ethnically diverse working-class female students who lived on campus. Although her findings were insightful, her sample of nine participants included six Asian students, and thus did not have enough representation different races and

ethnicities to draw conclusions about students' community cultural wealth relative to their race and ethnicity. This study compliments these studies to provide new insights about students' multiple and intersecting identities as well as describe assets of students who are often considered for their deficits.

Key Concepts and Definitions

The following key concepts are explored further in this study:

Agency is defined by Bandura (2006) as a person's intentional influence over their functioning and life circumstances.

Black is a socially constructed racial identity descriptor for non-Hispanic/Latina/o individuals of African descent.

Climate is described by Peterson and Spencer (1990) as the current attitudes and behaviors toward important dimensions of an organization. Climate, in contrast to culture, is more malleable as it focuses on current aspects of the organization, rather than deeply held beliefs, values, and meanings.

College and *university* are used interchangeably to refer to any bachelor's degree granting postsecondary institution of higher education.

Community cultural wealth is a concept developed by Yosso (2005) that refers to "the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (p. 69).

Cultural Dissonance is defined by Museus et al. (2015) as the tension students experience because of "incongruence between their cultural background or cultural meeting-making system and new cultures they encounter in college environments" (p. 70).

Culture is defined by Kuh and Whitt (1988) as "the collective, mutually shaping patterns

of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups… and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus" (pp. 12-13). Peterson and Spencer (1990) add that aspects of culture are deeply embedded in an organization, are relatively stable, yet are constantly changing.

Engagement represents both "the amount of time and energy students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities" as well as "how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 44).

Ethnicity refers to groups of people who share national origin, language, and/or culture such as Latina/o.

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex (APA, 2012).

Intersectionality is a framework "that recognizes how socially constructed identities are experienced simultaneously, not hierarchically (Abes, Jones, & McEwan, 2007, p. 2) and multiple identities influence a person's experience.

Latina/o is a socially constructed ethnic identity descriptor for individuals in the Americas of Hispanic descent. Latina/o is preferred over Hispanic in some communities to "acknowledge the unique histories of people in the Americas" (American Anthropological Association, 1997, p. 8).

Race is a socially constructed construct that refers to groups of people who share similar and distinct physical characteristics, such as Black and White.

Sense of belonging is the "psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community" (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007, p. 804). Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted that students may develop a sense of belonging toward a small social network and/or toward the entire campus community.

Social class is one's access to resources, norms, behaviors, and values related to one's relative position within social structures (Walpole, 2007). Social class is a construct typically composed of family income, parental education, and/or parental occupation. It can also include neighborhood and school district (Hollingshead, 2011/1975).

Student success is commonly marked by "academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies; persistence; attainment of educational objectives" and post-university performance **(**Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 10). It is the product of both individual agency and existing social structures (Kuh & Love, 2000, p. 49).

Transition is defined by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and role and may result in gains or losses" (p. 33). In higher education, transition is often defined as the first year in college.

White is a socially constructed racial identity descriptor for non-Hispanic/Latina/o individuals of European descent.

Working-class is a construct for people who have low social status, meaning they have less access to money, power, and resources of value (Kreiken, 2010). Characteristics of the working-class include low-incomes, no bachelor's degrees, and/or low occupation status (Hollingshead, 1958).

Organization of Research

This study is organized into six chapters. In this first chapter, I lay out the need for this study. In Chapter II, I explain the dominant paradigm—critical realism—that guided my research, present a thorough review of literature, introduce my conceptual framework, and describe relevant theories. In Chapter III, I describe my methodological approach, research design and method, site and participant selection, and data collection procedures. I also describe data protection, storage, and organization procedures, data analysis, and issues of validity. In Chapter IV, I provide an overview of the context of this study, including the university, city, and national context. I also provide descriptions of each participant case. In Chapter V, I present cross-case analyses where I divided participants into three groups based on the extent they achieved success, as they defined success. Finally, in Chapter VI, I discuss five findings, address limitations, and offer recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I have conducted a thorough review of literature to understand how working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experience the campus culture and climate during their transitions to an urban four-year public university and, furthermore, to understand what they draw on to navigate the transition. I begin this chapter by describing the process I used to review research and theories. I then describe the key tenants of critical realism, the paradigm that guided my analysis of literature and approach toward research. I provide a review of literature within the structure of my conceptual framework, which served as a model for my research design. Finally, I end with a summary that frames this study within the larger scope of literature and I explain why it is significant to higher education.

Review Process

I conducted a review of literature by first searching for peer reviewed studies and literature reviews that addressed college students' transition experiences with respect to class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Follow up searches included terms from theories important to this study. Search terms included: student, transition, adjustment, experience, college, university, higher education, postsecondary institution, first-year, freshman, low socioeconomic status, first-generation, working-class, class, low-income, first in family, gender, women, female, Black, African American, Latina, Latino, White, Hispanic, Chicana, Chicano, race, ethnicity, diverse, diversity, underrepresented, intersectional, anti-deficit, culture, climate, cultural capital, cultural wealth. I used electronic academic search engines such as ERIC EBSCO, Project Muse, Google Scholar, and JSTOR to conduct this search. Additionally, I reviewed relevant studies from reference lists. I excluded studies that focused on students with disabilities as their experiences

warrant additional focus beyond the scope of this study. I also eliminated studies that looked at foreign born students in the United States because they perceive culture and climate differently from individuals raised in the US. Finally, I organized the literature review to coincide with aspects of students' transition experiences, drawing from Schlossberg's transition model (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

Research Paradigm

My research is guided by the philosophical position of critical realism. Maxwell (2013), a qualitative methodologist with interest in the philosophical implications of research, states that critical realism has the perspective of ontological realism and epistemological constructivism. Ontological realism is the belief that a real world exists independently of perceptions and theories. Epistemological constructivism is the perspective that peoples' understanding of the world is constructed by experiences, perspectives, and interactions with reality (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43). In other words, an objective reality exists and peoples' perspectives are real. People cannot, however, fully understand objective reality; rather, people can gather evidence to develop perceptions that approach objective reality. Furthermore, people's understanding of reality can be advanced by shifting perspectives. Shifting perspectives is key to this study as I explored the wealth of working-class students, who are more often defined for their deficits.

Critical realists hold that mental phenomena (meanings, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, values, and intentions) are real entities. This principle is different from other paradigms, such as behaviorists and positivists, who believe only observable behaviors are real and mental phenomena are mere abstractions of behavior (Maxwell, 2013). This distinction is significant because, within the critical realist paradigm, perceptions influence behaviors (as opposed to simply being abstractions of behavior) and, therefore, are worthy of research. Furthermore,

critical realists believe culture is real and can be inferred through individuals' perceptions rather than through observations (Maxwell, 2013, p. 26). I applied these principles in my review of literature as I not only considered students' experiences but I also considered students' perspectives to understand their transition experiences.

Foundations of Literature Review

Social Class

Many researchers who study working-class students use different constructs, which have resulted in fragmented lines of inquiry (Walpole, 2007). Specifically, researchers have examined students' socioeconomic status (Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016), first-generation status (Carpenter & Peña, 2016; Stephens, Hamden, & Destin, 2014), first-in-family status (O'Shea, 2013), family income (Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015), and social class (Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015; Karabel & Astin, 1975). Additionally, Walpole (2007) created an umbrella term, economically and educationally challenged, to include all these lines of inquiry. I use the term social class because it highlights structural and cultural based inequities underscore the persistent, intergenerational nature of class based inequities and counters the belief that anyone who works hard can be successful (Lawler, 2005; Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013). Social class is defined as one's access to resources, norms, behaviors, and values related to one's relative position within social structures (Walpole, 2007). It is typically determined by family income, parental education, and/or parental occupation and can also include neighborhood and school district (Hollingshead, 2011/1975). Walpole (2007) has affirmed the use of a non-deficit perspective clarifying that class cultural differences result from inequalities rather than cause inequities.

I use the term working-class to define all students who have low social status including poor students. I use this term, instead of other terms, because it does not mark individuals as deficient with *low status* and, instead, focuses on common experiences of people with respect to their relationships (workers) to other classes (professionals). Additionally, even though poor students have the least financial wealth and access to resources, they are culturally similar in many ways to working-class students since they often attend the same schools and live in the same neighborhoods (Walpole, 2007). In my literature review, I draw on all lines of inquiry described above to develop a comprehensive understanding of working-class students' transition experiences.

College Student Transitions

Goodman et al. (2006) has defined transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). For traditional-aged college students, transition commonly refers to the time from graduating high school through the first year of college. This period is often filled with excitement where students, for the first time, are on their own and responsible for their own lives. O'Shea (2013) found in her qualitative study of 17 first-in-family, mostly adult, female college students that transitions to college can be opportunities for learning, personal growth, and development. Yet many students do not persist after their first year in college. Almost all students experience stress, anxiety, homesickness, academic adjustments, and so on making the risk for dropping out high (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). These challenges are more pronounced for working-class students, who withdraw from higher education at higher rates than their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1994). Engle and Tinto (2008) analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education's Beginning Postsecondary Study of 2001 and found that 26% of first-generation and low-income

students did not enroll at any institution of higher education after the first year of college compared to 7% of their peers. Thus, students' transition experiences are particularly important to promoting working-class students' success.

O'Shea (2013) remarked that transitions often refer to a move from one place to another but they can also involve a person revising their identities, sense of agency, life significance, and self-concept. Thus, students not only experience transitions to a new college environment, but they also experience transitions of *self*. I explore the complex reality of students' transition of *self* through organizing my literature review according to key concepts in Schlossberg's transition model.

Schlossberg's Transition Model

Schlossberg's transition model provides structure to understanding the transition process. The model, shown in Figure 1, first describes the main factors that influence transitions including the type (planned or unplanned), context, and impact (Goodman et al., 2006). For many students, going to college is a planned transition that occurs after graduating high school. Students immerse themselves into a new context, the university. Students are also significantly personally impacted by the transition to college as they manage new modes of learning, routines, environments, relationships, assumptions, and responsibilities.

Goodman et al. (2006) structured the transition process into four factors, referred to as the *4 S System*, which includes *self* (students' characteristics), *situation* (what is happening), *strategies* (how the student manages the situation), and *support* (who or what the student relies on). Goodman et al. has explained that each factor contains assets, resources, liabilities, and deficits. Furthermore, the ease of the transition process can be thought of as the ratio of assets and resources to liabilities and deficits. Based on the data shared above, researchers,

policymakers, and practitioners have perceived working-class students to have more liabilities and deficits than their peers.

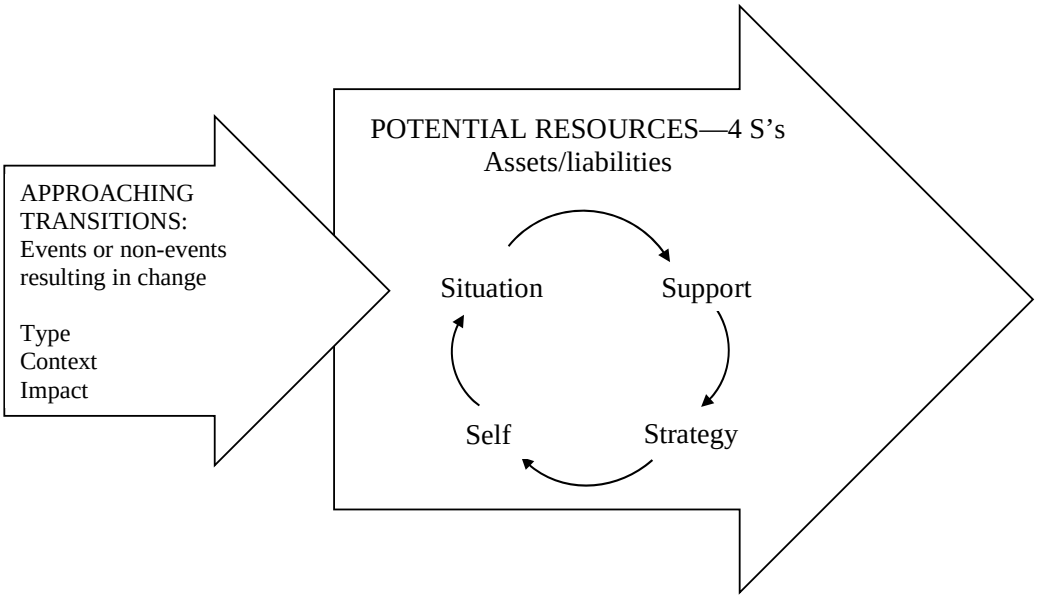

Figure 1. Schlossberg's Transition Model (Goodman et al., 2006)

To improve the success for working-class, Latina, Black, and White female students during their transitions to college, practitioners and researchers may focus on reducing students' liabilities and deficiencies. This strategy is essentially a deficit approach. Another strategy is to change structures so that students' assets are valued and resources are recognized and maximized. This wealth-based, non-deficit strategy is gaining momentum in higher education research (see Carter, 2003; O'Shea, 2015).

Non-deficit Perspective

I incorporated a non-deficit perspective in my review of literature. By taking a non-deficit approach, I challenge dominant narratives that assign importance to certain experiences, habits, perceptions, and values while largely ignoring other experiences, habits, perceptions, and values. With a deficit perspective, students' deficiencies are highlighted while structural factors that privilege some students over others are largely ignored (Museus et al., 2015; Tierney, 1999).

By using a non-deficit perspective to understand the experiences of Latina, Black, and White working-class female students, I identified structural advantages and challenges for students within the literature.

Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 2, is grounded in Schlossberg's transition model. I begin by discussing students' *precollege self* which, in Schlossberg's transition model, aligns with the *self* domain in the 4 S System (Goodman et al., 2006). A students' precollege self includes identity characteristics such as race and ethnicity, social class, and gender as well as their knowledge, skills, and agency. I also incorporate Yosso's (2005) concept of *community cultural wealth,* framed in the students' precollege environment, to emphasize students' assets and resources using a non-deficit perspective. I then describe the context of the transition, the university environment, specifically focusing on the university culture and climate. The concepts establish the framework of the transition: the interaction of a person (college student) with an environment (university). I next describe the transition process, which is organized by Schlossberg's 4 S System: self, situation, support, and strategies. In this section, support is separated into university support and non-university support. Finally, I discuss changes in the student identified as college-going self with focus on both on institutional outcomes and student-defined outcomes.

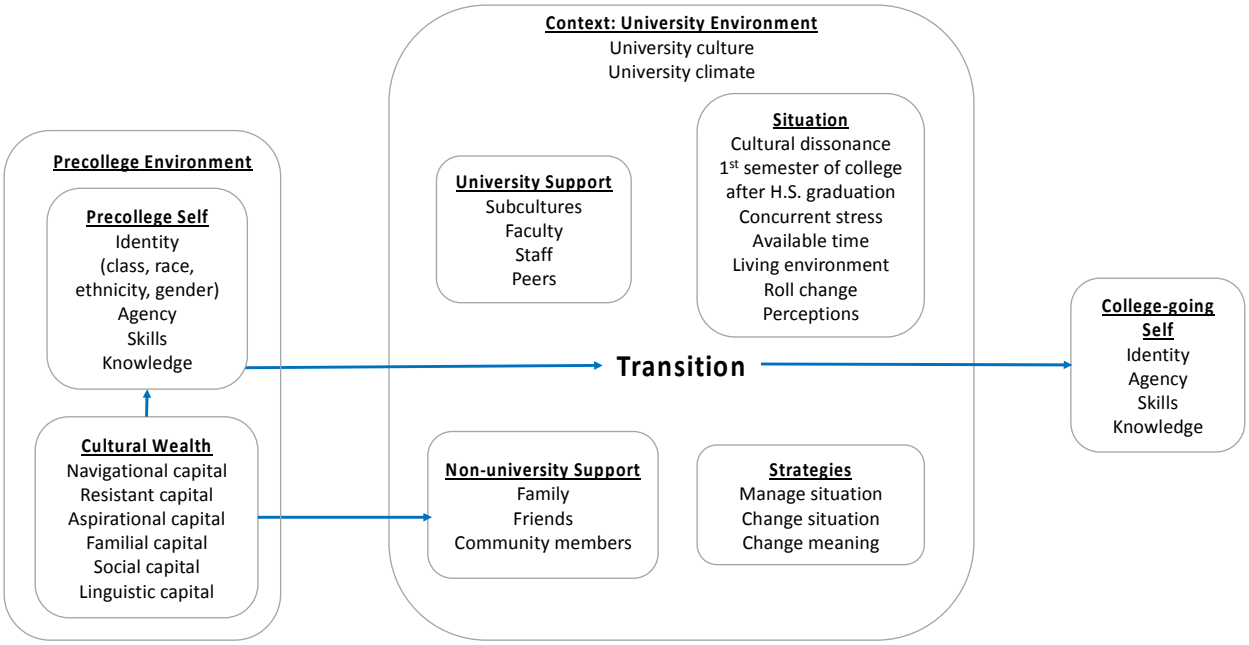

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Precollege Self

Goodman et al. (2006) has stated that the *self* domain is "what the individual brings to the transition" (p. 65). I focused on four aspects of students' precollege self: identity, knowledge and skills, and agency. Furthermore, I highlighted the influence of students' cultures, specifically their *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005).

Identity. Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) have emphasized that identity is a fluid concept that has different implications depending on time and location. Additionally, identities are shaped both by individuals' perceptions about their identities and commonly held perceptions about their identities. Thus, identities are also associated with oppression and privilege, which involve unearned assets that benefit some groups and disadvantage other groups (Patton et al., 2016). Furthermore, individuals internalize commonly held perceptions about their identities. For instance, stereotype threat is an identity contingency where anxiety is induced when individuals subconsciously consider that they are being judged with stereotypes commonly

associated with their identity (Steele, 2010). Steele and Aronson (1995) and Spencer, Steele, and Quinn (1999) found that stereotype threat caused women and students of color who cared about their achievement to perform worse than equally academically prepared White male students on standardized tests. I purposefully reviewed research that addresses students' class, race and ethnicity, and gender identities.

Class. Several researchers have reduced the experiences of working-class students to deficiencies including having low-incomes, low educational aspirations, lack of academic preparation, and lack of knowledge about college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Walpole, 2007). Astin and Osequera (2011) found that working-class students are less likely to enroll in higher education than middle-class and upper-class students. If they do enroll, they often attend less selective institutions than their peers of equal academic achievement (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Giani, 2015; Karabel & Astin, 1975). Paulsen and St. John (2002) examined data from the National Postsecondary Study Aid Survey of 1987 and found that working-class students were concerned about college costs and attended less selective, more affordable institutions regardless of their academic ability. Paulsen and St. John (2002), Terenzini et al. (2001), and Giani (2015) all looked at national datasets and found that students of low social class have lower educational aspirations than middle and upper-class peers.

Yet, many researchers have found that students do not perceive their social class to influence their experiences (Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; Stuber, 2011; Wilkins, 2014). Stuber (2011) conducted interviews with 26 White working-class students who persisted to the second year of college and found that many White working-class students recognized that most of their peers were of higher social classes, but White working-class students did not perceive their social class to affect their experiences. Similarly, Wilkins (2014) found in her

interviews of eight first-generation White men that they defined themselves as “normal” (p. 177). Langhout et al. (2007) also found that about 90% of students at a wealthy liberal arts college experienced behaviors related to classism and discrimination based on social class, but only 6% reported experiencing classism.

The invisible nature of social class may be attributable to the lack of dialogue about social class in the United States. For example, Stuber (2011) found that White students from urban areas described their class-based experiences racially and did not have the priming to understand their differences in terms of social class. Furthermore, she found that White students who grew up in predominantly White communities assumed that programs for first-generation students were for students of color (Stuber, 2011).

Most qualitative inquiries that have looked at social class have either focused on the experiences of White students (see Stuber, 2009, 2011), have not specified race or ethnicity (see O’Shea, 2013, 2015), have focused on adults (see O’Shea, 2013, 1015), or have inadequate representation (see Nuñez, 2005). Therefore, relatively little is known about working-class students from different races and ethnicities. Furthermore, these studies have only looked at students who have already persisted through the first year in college. Thus, relatively little is known about working-class students who have dropped out of college.

Race and ethnicity and class. Race and social class are often conflated in educational research as students of color are disproportionately of working-class (Stuber, 2011; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2007). This perpetuates deficit thinking about students of color (Stuber, 2011). In addition, as illustrated above, many White working-class students believe they are part of the middle-class and do not recognize structural inequities (Stuber, 2011; Wilkins, 2014). Stuber (2011) speculated that their whiteness may serve as a buffer allowing them to fit in without

focusing on differences. Furthermore, she has suggested that working-class White, Black, and Latina/o students may have many similarities; however, racial identities may constrain working-class groups of different races and ethnicities from forming "class-based alliances" (Stuber, 2011, p. 120). Thus, race helps maintain social class divisions.

With Black and Latina/o students disproportionately represented among working-class college students, most research findings on Black and Latina/o students of all classes resemble findings on working-class students. For example, Carter et al. (2013) conducted a review of research on transition experiences of students of color and found that they are less engaged on campus, have less academic preparation, and have fewer financial resources than their White peers. Furthermore, students of color are more likely to enroll at community colleges or less selective institutions (Carter et al., 2013). Carter et al. (2013) has suggested that more nuanced understanding of experiences of students of color is essential to help increase equity in higher education.

Unfortunately, many researchers have not disentangled race and class or examined the cumulative effect of having multiple marginalized identities (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Covarrubias and Fryberg's (2015) research suggests that when White first-generation students are disaggregated by income, they have cultural similarities to Latina/os with regards to guilt about going to college. Furthermore, when data are disaggregated by both race and class, Black and Latina/o students often have better outcomes than White students (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). However, most research with students of color have either focused on a single race or ethnicity or have not disaggregated students by race and ethnicity (Carter et al., 2013). Additional research on the experiences of students from different races and ethnicities is discussed in the appropriate sections below.

Gender and class. Although women have higher enrollment and graduation rates, men have been found to be more advantaged because they attend more highly selective institutions, live on campus, and succeed in more lucrative majors (St. John, Hu, Simmons, & Musoba, 2001; Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000)**.** Females particularly are less likely than men to enroll in STEM majors (Allen, 2011; Cole & Espinoza, 2008). Furthermore, Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that working-class women were less likely to maintain continuous enrollment than working-class men.

Leppel (2002) analyzed the 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students dataset and found that marriage and children influence the educational experiences of men and women differently. In particular, more women are single parents or primarily responsible for childcare than men. Furthermore, student parents face unique challenges in obtaining daycare. Lehmann (2014) described that a person's role in their family can restrict options. Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, and Vázquez (2013) found that Latinas may be expected to maintain caretaker roles in their families during their transition to college and, thus, may be less likely to attend universities far away from home.

Stewart and Ostrove (1993) illustrated distinctions among women of different social classes in their longitudinal survey analysis of women who attended Radcliffe College (a college at Harvard University). They looked at the intersection of class and gender regarding college experiences and found that working-class women had less positive experiences, felt out of place, and had different purposes for attending college than middle and upper-class women. Working-class women, more than middle and upper-class women, felt that the feminist movement resonated with them. Additional research that distinguishes gender differences is highlighted throughout this literature review.

Knowledge and skills. Working-class students lack knowledge about the college-going process (Hurst, 2009; O'Shea, 2015; Terenzini Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Hurst (2009) conducted a two-year ethnographic study of 21 working-class students and found that they had trouble navigating college applications, financial aid applications, and other processes to attend college. Furthermore, working-class students are sometimes reluctant to take out financial aid (Hurst, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Winkle-Wagner (2008) conducted biweekly focus groups to learn about the experiences of 30 first-year, first-generation, Black female students and found that they were more likely to use credit cards than take out student loans despite many advantages of student loans.

Working-class students and students of color have less academic preparation than middle and upper-class White students (Hurst, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1994). They often attend less resourced schools with fewer advanced placement course options (Hurst, 2009; Terenzini et al., 2001). Hurst (2009) explained that working-class students also lacked support from their high schools. She found that guidance counselors primarily worked with students who had behavior challenges rather than helping students navigate the college selection and application process. She also found that teachers tracked students toward less selective institutions, which tend to have fewer resources than highly selective institutions (Hurst, 2009). O'Connor, Mueller, Lewis, Rivas-Drake, and Rosenberg (2011) had similar findings for Black high school students; however, a few teachers also lamented that their colleagues often did not give Black students the benefit of the doubt like they did for White students when making academic decisions.

Agency. Despite the challenges described above, many working-class female students of different races and ethnicities enroll in four-year universities and are successful (Solórzano, Ceja,

& Yosso, 2000; Stuber, 2011; Winkle-Wagner, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). Their resilience is partially attributable to their agency. Bandura (2006) has defined agency as a person's intentional influence over one's functioning and life circumstances. Students' agency can help them navigate seemingly insurmountable barriers, or, for those with less agency, crumble from seemingly minor setbacks. Furthermore, students may assume control over their lives by rejecting schooling altogether (Carter, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).

Yet no matter the degree of agency, a person may not be able to overcome structural barriers (Bandura, 2006). People still act with agency in response to structures. As such, working-class students should not be seen as victims. Such notions imply that people have no control over their lives. Furthermore, students may live by different values. For examples, Nuñez et al. (2013) suggested that many Latina students are restricted in their college options because of family responsibilities. However, students may not see their lives as restricted; rather, they may use agency to find ways to both stay connected to family and attend college. What may seem like a restricted choice might actually be an act of agency guided by different values than middle and upper-class students. Yosso (2005) has highlighted how different cultures may demonstrate agency in her concept of *community cultural wealth.*

Cultural wealth. Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, adapted from Oliver and Shapiro (1995), reframes the predominant ideology about Latina/o college students from a deficit-centered framework to one that highlights cultural values. Specifically, Yosso (2005) built on Bourdieu's (1977/1990) theory of social reproduction, which explains the persistent nature of social class differences, to focus on the cultural wealth of individuals who have identities not associated with power and privilege. To understand the significance of Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, I first explain Bourdieu's theory of social

reproduction. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990).

Social reproduction. Most central to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is the construct, cultural capital, which refers to the skills, abilities, tastes, preferences, or norms that act as a form of currency (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). In essence, a person's culture acts as a resource. Additionally, Bourdieu's concept of field is a space in which cultural capital is produced and given value (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). People in different fields (cultures) assign value to different skills, abilities, tastes, preferences, or norms, which serve as cultural capital. A person who grows up in a particular field is likely to seek and acquire cultural capital valued in that field. However, in another field, a person's cultural capital may not be valued.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* functions as "perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977/1990, pp. 82-83). An individual's habitus is internalized from early childhood to adulthood often without consciousness. For example, a person's habitus might determine their mannerisms or speech patterns. Their habitus serves as cultural capital, with some speech patterns (e.g., slang, accent) being more valued in some fields than in others (see Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009).

Social capital refers to a person's social connections and networks. In social settings, a person's social capital gives them status and can connect them to additional cultural capital. For example, a person may call on a friend to gain access to a new business opportunity, an exclusive event, a child caretaker, or a repair person.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990) proposed that those who are in power have both cultural and social capital that helps sustain their status. Although Bourdieu and Passeron (1977/1990) do not assign more value to the cultural and social capital of those who are in power versus those who are not in power, they have observed individuals who are not in positions of

power try to acquire social and cultural capital of those who are in power to gain power for themselves. Thus, their theory explains how inequity is reproduced since the capital of individuals who are in power is often perceived by all to be valuable. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977/1990) theory on social reproduction does not resolve equity issues in education; rather it may be used to explain how social class is persistent and intergenerational.

Community cultural wealth. With this premise, Yosso (2005) built on Bourdieu's (1977/1990) theory of social reproduction to show that Latina/os have capital that is different from middle and upper-class White culture. Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth encourages new perspectives that have potential to disrupt social reproduction and increase equity by acknowledging the wealth and value of non-majority cultures. She demonstrated that Latina/o students have community cultural wealth, which is comprised of six overlapping forms of capital including familial, social, linguistic, and aspirational capital. Additionally, she suggested that Latina/os have resistance and navigational capital to help them achieve success in middle and upper-class White cultures (Yosso, 2005). I applied this conceptualization more broadly to emphasize the strengths of working-class Latina, Black, and White female college students.

Although I discuss the community cultural wealth of working-class Latina, Black, and White female students together, I anticipated that they may have differences in wealth. For example, Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) surveyed 254 Black first-year students and 291 White first-year students and found that Black students experienced increasing sense of belonging to the college community during their transition to college when they had greater peer and family connections. The opposite was true for White students. This supports the notion that students' community cultural wealth—shaped by their precollege environments including family,

schools, peers, and other community members—influences students' identities, knowledge, skills, and agency.

Navigational capital and resistant capital. *Navigational capital* is the ability to engage in many different cultural environments and *resistant capital* refers to knowledge and skills to challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital might include storytelling, acting with authenticity, and surrounding oneself with others who affirm one's identity and culture (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). For example, Sims (2008) found that Black female students were successful in college despite not engaging in university activities. Sims suggested that the students in his study did not have the desire to participate in activities that aligned more with White culture and, instead, navigated the university using other culturally supportive means.

Jack (2016) found that working-class students have differences in moral reasoning. For example, working-class students valued working hard rather than being "kiss asses" to faculty and staff with informal interactions (p. 9). Additionally, Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) surveyed 1,424 students about characteristics of interdependence and independence and found that first-generation students had more interdependent characteristics. These two studies suggest that working-class students may be hard workers and successful at building relationships, making friends, and engaging in collaborative projects. However, these navigational skills have not been studied extensively in higher education research.

Furthermore, Harper (2006) explored how navigational capital plays an important role in helping students be successful in different cultural and educational environments in his research with 32 high achieving Black male college students. Researchers once theorized that Black students sometimes rejected education because it is associated with *acting White* (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004). However, Harper (2006) conducted a qualitative study exploring the

college experiences of Black males and found that they were not shamed by peers for their academic interests; rather, they were shamed when they demonstrated inauthenticity by distancing themselves from their culture. When Black males successfully embrace their culture while showing academic commitment, their peers support them academically.

Aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) has described aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). A number of studies support this concept. For example, Arzy, Davies, and Harbour (2006) found that working-class students felt responsibility to move out of poverty and to meet expectations of individuals from their communities. This sense of purpose served as a motivator for completing a college degree. Furthermore, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that Black first-year students reported higher aspirational goals to attend graduate school than their White peers.

Familial capital. Yosso (2005) has described familial capital as the cultural knowledge and care for one's family as well as one's community. A number of researchers found that working-class students' families offered a lot of emotional support and encouragement, despite lacking knowledge about the college selection and application process (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Hurst, 2009). Furthermore, notions of familial capital are found in students' aspirations to give back to their communities (Arzy et al., 2006) and to maintain authenticity (Harper, 2006).

Social capital. Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources. Bedsworth, Colby, and Doctor (2006) found that students were more likely to attend college if their peers intended to attend college. Social capital also serves as a large source of support for Black, Latina, White, working-class, and female students during their transition experiences (Baber, 2012; Harper, 2006; O'Shea, 2015; Stuber, 2011). I offer a more thorough examination of social capital later in this chapter.

Linguistic capital. Linguistic capital refers to the "skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 68). For example, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) have discussed the significance of learning via storytelling in Black and Latina/o communities. Furthermore, students may be bilingual or multilingual. Valenzuela (1999) found that speaking Spanish was important to Latina/o high school students who sought culturally relevant learning. Furthermore, Black, Latina/o, and working-class students may be skilled at navigating different communication styles depending on the situation. For example, Baber (2012) found in his qualitative study of 15 Black first-year students that they navigated "speaking correctly" in class while not using correct grammar with peers to maintain connections to their cultural identity (p. 72).

Increasingly researchers are using non-deficit frameworks. However, only a few researchers have conducted studies that have specifically looked at the cultural wealth of working-class students (O'Shea, 2013, 2015). Walpole (2007) suggested that low-income students may be hard-workers, strategic, and problem-solvers; however, research is still needed to explore these concepts. A few studies have examined cultural wealth for Latina/o and Black students and women (see Carter, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999; and Yosso et al., 2009). Additionally, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986) concept of *women's ways of knowing,* which describes caring and nurturing as strengths rather than liabilities, emphasizes the community cultural wealth of women. Yet, within this model, women of different races and ethnicities may have different forms of cultural wealth. For example, Hausmann et al. (2007) found that Black women's sense of belonging increased with peer connections; whereas, White women's sense of belonging declined with peer connections. Although research on students' wealth is increasing, very little is known about the community cultural wealth of students with multiple and

intersecting identities.

Context

Many institutional factors influence college students' transitions including location, size, mission, selectivity, institution type, financial aid packages, engagement opportunities, expenditures, cost of attendance, advising, class sizes, housing, degree offerings, policies, and so on (Browman & Destin, 2016; Franklin, 2013; Langhout et al., 2007; Langhout et al., 2009; McCormick, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2013; Museus & Neville, 2012; Pike, Kuh, McCormick, Ethington, & Smart, 2011; Stuber, 2011).

University environment. Titus (2006) found that college completion is positively associated with racially and socioeconomically diverse institutions. Meanwhile, institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly stratified by social class. In 1975, Karabel and Astin examined equity in higher education by examining social class stratification based on institution selectivity. They found that working-class students were less likely to attend college and attended less selective institutions. In 2004, Astin and Osequera conducted a similar study and found that social class stratification in higher education had indeed become worse as illustrated in Table 1. They found that one in 27 first-generation students attended highly selective institutions; whereas, in 1971, the ratio was one in 18 (Astin & Osequera, 2004). Thus, fewer first-generation students exist. Moreover, those who are first-generation are even less likely to enroll in highly selective institutions.

Table 1.

First-year Students Entering Institutions of High Selectivity: Changes in Composition by Parental Educational Level (adapted from Astin & Osequera, 2004)

Parental education level	1971	2000	Absolute change since 1971	Relative change from 1971 to 2002
High[1]	28.2	61.5	+33	+118
Middle[2]	46.8	29.5	-17	-37
Low[3]	25.1	9.1	-16	-64

1. Both parents have college degree
2. At least one parent did not complete college
3. Neither parent attended college

Working-class students who do enroll in college also report experiencing a number of challenges navigating institutional structures and processes. Hughes and Smail (2014) found that students were frustrated with policies, processes, poor signage, poor directions, and being redirected to different offices. O'Shea (2015) similarly found that students had trouble with understanding their bill, how to pay, how to read their class schedules, and so on.

Furthermore, Winkle-Wagner (2008) found in her ethnographic study of 25 first-generation Black female college students that financial aid and financial literacy were significant factors for their success. She advocated for increases to financial aid and for financial literacy courses. Although financial aid certainly alleviates students' financial concerns, it also largely allows institutions to ignore making substantial changes to control costs and make higher education more affordable (Alstete, 2014; Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016). Financial literacy courses may be helpful to students, but they do not solve the fundamental problem of college affordability.

Universities have developed a number of programs to help students overcome their identified deficiencies including *developmental* (remedial) courses, supplemental instruction, and tutoring among others. These programs have been developed without substantially changing institutional structures. Thus, students who are identified as deficient, who are often of working-class, are required to commit more time to transitioning successfully in college. Meanwhile working-class students work more and have more family responsibilities than their peers (Kezar

et al., 2015; Walpole 2007). Few researchers look at structural barriers to working-class students' success.

Astin (1984/1999), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Kuh (2001, 2013) have found that students' engagement with the university positively impacts their success. As such, practitioners have focused on increasing high impact practices (HIPs) via social structures such as learning communities, bridge programs, study abroad, and undergraduate research among others to increase students' engagement in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2013; Kuh et al., 2007). However, these paradigms were constructed with research on students of majority culture identities (Carter et al., 2013; McCormick et al., 2013). Thus, they are often framed in upper middle-class White culture and offer recommendations that require students to adapt and acculturate to existing structures (Tanaka, 2002). Kuh (2008) examined data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and found that historically underrepresented students, including working-class students and students of color, are more likely to benefit from HIPs; however, they are less likely to participate in HIPs (Harper, 2009; Kuh, 2008). Not only do HIPs require additional time from students, some students do not see them as important to their success (Sims, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Practitioners continue to use practices that are not empirically backed by the experiences of students with diverse backgrounds (Carter et al., 2013). Meanwhile, working-class students have limited time as they are more likely to work, take care of families, and travel to and from school compared to middle and upper-class students (Kezar et al., 2015; Walpole, 2011). Thus, a growing number of researchers have declared these strategies inadequate to increasing success for working-class students (Bensimon, 2007; Harper, 2007; Kezar et al., 2015; Lamont et al., 2010; McCormick et al., 2013; Museus, 2007; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Thomas, 2002). Tierney

(1999) suggested that these deficit models, where students are perceived to lack qualities, are counterproductive and unjust. Tierney (2000), Museus and Neville (2012), and Tanaka (2002) have suggested that higher education literature often puts onus on students to become engaged while the structure of institutions remain largely intact. Therefore, to meaningfully address students' success, researchers should incorporate non-deficit frameworks to study the experiences of students who experience the least success in college.

Specifically, students' transition experiences must be examined from a culturally conscious perspective that considers the influence of class, race and ethnicity, and gender among others (Goodman et al., 2006). Goodman et al. (2006) referenced a speech by counselor Donelda Cooke (1994) to explain,

> By looking at various groups' experiences regarding domination, oppression, and co-existence, you can begin to understand the amount of control individuals have over the circumstances in their lives, or the limited choices they may have in their assets, liabilities, and resources. While [Schlossberg's transition] theory leaves room to explore the sense of control one has over one's transitions, unless sociopolitical constraints are boldly articulated, readers from privileged classes can too easily overlook them" (p. 60).

With this framework, I examined the university context by focusing on institutional culture and climate.

Culture and climate. Institutional culture and climate are two constructs that are sometimes conflated in higher education research. Peterson and Spencer (1990) examined the research lineage of the two constructs and noted that institutional culture and climate have important distinctions significant to research. See Table 2 for a comparison of the two constructs.

Table 2.

Primary Distinctions of Culture and Climate

Organizational concept	**Culture**	**Climate**
Basis	Deeply shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies of members	Current members' perceptions, attitudes, feelings about university life
Organizational perspective	Holistic primary patterns	Pervasive individual perspectives of various organizational patterns
Major purposes of concept	What meaning does the university have for its members?	How are participants' behaviors controlled or motivated within the university
Emphasis	Superordinate meaning	Common view of participants
Major characteristics	Embedded or enduring	Current patterns or atmosphere
Nature of change	Not malleable; via cataclysmic or long-term and intensive effort	More malleable through various direct or indirect means.

Adapted from Peterson & Spencer (1990)

Kuh and Whitt (1988) defined culture as "the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups… and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus" (pp. 12-13). Peterson and Spencer (1990) have added that aspects of culture are deeply embedded in an organization and are relatively stable. Furthermore, some aspects of institutional culture are similar across institutions of higher education such as commitment toward teaching and learning, governance structures, and so on. Yet, institutions also have unique cultures and subcultures making it difficult to define what elements comprise a culture before studying it. In contrast, Peterson and Spencer have stated that climate is easier to study since the elements are more easily defined in terms of perceptions, processes, and patterns. Peterson and Spencer defined climate as the current attitudes and behaviors toward important

dimensions of an organization. They distinguished that climate is more malleable than culture as it focuses on current aspects of the organization, rather than deeply held beliefs, values, and meanings.

To understand working-class, Latina, Black, and White female students' experiences using a critical realist perspective, I examined both institutional culture and climate. By examining institutional culture, I sought to understand how deeply embedded values, practices, and beliefs influence students' experiences within the institution. Specifically, I examined the experiences of students whose cultures are likely to contrast with that of the university. By examining institutional climate, I could better understand students' perceptions toward the university environment. Thus, I sought to understand both students' experiences and their perceptions of their experiences.

University culture. University culture is built upon the history of the institution and of higher education. It is reflected through language and discourse, symbols and physical structures, organizational structures, protocols of engagement, and values—which includes the value of certain knowledge. American universities have strong cultures espoused in traditions that can be traced to the first American colleges. For example, today many first-year students are required to live in residence halls. This tradition dates to Harvard University, the first American college, which followed the English model by requiring students to live and learn together (Thelin, 2011). Additionally, students engaged in intercollegiate athletics, pledged fraternities, and demonstrated knowledge by giving oral presentations (Thelin, 2011). Furthermore, most students were White sons of wealthy families (Thelin, 2011). As such, the culture of higher education reflects upper-class White culture.

The relationship between education and inequity is deeply embedded in education in the

United States. For example, students funded by scholarships worked in dining facilities and served students who paid tuition (Thelin, 2011). Furthermore, commencement ceremonies comprised graduates sorted by family status rather than alphabetical order and admissions decisions were based on family affiliation rather than on academic merit (Thelin, 2011).

Since the colonial days, higher education has been inaccessible for many students. Women and Black students were prohibited from attending college. Furthermore, time was a huge factor for working-class White males since college required a multiyear commitment and many farming families simply could not afford to lose the help of a son (Thelin, 2011).

The landscape of higher education has dramatically shifted since then. Education has increasingly been viewed as a path to social mobility. With the abolition of slavery, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded to provide Black individuals formal education during the reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. Federal legislation also expanded access to higher education with the Morrell Acts of 1868 and 1890, the GI Bill, and the Higher Education Act of 1964. Equity in education has particularly been the focus of higher education policymakers for over the past fifty years with programs and policies ranging from federal student loans, TRiO programs, Title IX of the Higher Education Act, and so on. In many ways, these policies and programs have increased access to higher education.

While access to higher education has widened, markers of social status have shifted or been safeguarded. For example, most HBCUs initially focused on teaching trade and farming skills rather than liberal arts education. Thus, Black students did not have access to knowledge associated with wealth. Additionally, as illustrated earlier, institutions of higher education have become increasingly more stratified (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Karabel & Astin, 1975). Furthermore, experiences within higher education continue to serve as markers of social class

with exclusive clubs, Greek associations, and academic majors (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Seeley, 2014; Thelin, 2011).

Not only is higher education reflective of upper-middle-class White culture, but different institutions of higher education also have cultural differences. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) surveyed university administrators and found that 84% of top tier and 45% of second tier administrators said their university culture reflected independence. Museus (2007) found that institutions that are successful at promoting success of students of color have a campus culture of interdependence where administrators take responsibility for students' success by cultivating relationships with students and staff and care for all aspects of the students' lives.

Research on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) offers evidence to support that institutional culture affects students' success (Braxton, 2000). HBCUs notably have different cultures from PWIs (Allen, 1992). They value mentoring, support, building confidence, and creating a welcoming environment (Palmer & Gasman, 2008); whereas, PWIs value individualism, competition, criticism, and autonomy (Tierney, 1992). Furthermore, similarly prepared working-class Black students who attend HBCUs are more successful than working-class Black students who attend PWIs (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Perna et al., 2006). Thus, similarly prepared students who attend colleges and universities that espouse cultural values similar to their precollege cultures are more likely to be successful. Furthermore, underrepresented students have cultural capital in environments where their culture is valued, such as at HBCUs or within Black student organizations.

Research on university culture is a complex task because the pervasiveness of majority culture ideology allows culturally specific values to remain unrecognized and invisible to the

majority culture (Bensimon, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Freire 1970/2000; Tanaka, 2002). Hence majority cultures may perceive their cultures as the norm (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire (1970/2000), moreover, explained that the majority culture is even sometimes invisible to those who are disadvantaged by it. Consequently, individuals who do not espouse the same cultural values as the majority may be perceived to have deficits within universities that are biased toward the majority culture (Bensimon, 2007; Carter, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

Yet, embedded elements of culture can have significant, subtle, and pervasive influence on individuals (Steele, 2010). Working-class students and students of color may feel "like a fish out of water" (Thomas, 2002, p. 431) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) because their precollege cultures and values are different (Baber, 2012; Rendón, 1992). Rendón (1992) and Baber (2012) shared personal experiences in higher education where they struggled to balance two competing cultures, both of which have value to them. Additionally, Museus and Quaye (2009) and Baber (2012) conducted qualitative studies of African American male students and found that they struggled to assimilate to the university culture while valuing their precollege cultures. Ostrove and Long (2007) further described how the upper-middle-class culture at Radcliffe College of Harvard led to working-class female students feeling isolated. Furthermore, Carter (2005) conducted a qualitative study of low-income Black and Latina/o teens and found that all participants valued education. However, their engagement in school varied based on how much they were willing to assume characteristics of the majority culture and how much their teachers valued their culture.

University climate. Several researchers have found that working-class students experience a less supportive campus climate than their peers (Arzy et al., 2006; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Soria et al., 2013). Furthermore, researchers have overwhelmingly found that students of

color experience a poor climate (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Allen and Madden (2006) also found that women experience a worse climate than men related to gender. Furthermore, the intersection of multiple marginalized identities can influence how students' experience the campus climate (Armstrong et al., 2014; Langhout et al., 2007). Particularly, students of color and women experienced more classism—defined as negative climate toward individuals with low social status—than their peers. They also found that male students of color, regardless of social class, experienced classism.

Researchers have found that the campus climate influences students' sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 2007; Locks, Bowman, Hurtado, & Oseguera, 2006; Soria et al., 2013). Hausmann et al. (2007) have defined sense of belonging as a measure of the extent to which students feel a part of the campus community. Furthermore, Hausmann et al. (2007) and Hurtado et al. (1996) found that a student's sense of belonging is linked to students' persistence to the second year. Locks et al. (2008) also found that students' sense of belonging is particularly important during their transitions to college.

A few researchers have looked at how campus climate influences students' transition experiences. Jack (2014) and Museus, Yee, and Lambe (2011) conducted qualitative studies of working-class students and students of color respectively and found that students were unlikely to engage in high impact practices when the climate was uncomfortable or hostile. Furthermore, Hurtado at al. (2007) looked at 26,000 responses from the Cooperative Institute Research Program (CIRP) 2004 Freshman survey and 2005 Your First College Year survey and found that students' perceptions of campus climate affected their academic adjustment. Langhout et al. (2009) also found that classism affected working-class students' academic adjustment and

strongly correlated with their intent to leave college. Furthermore, O'Shea (2015) studied the first-semester transition experiences of 17 mostly adult female students who were the first in their families to attend college and found that the campus climate did not meet students' expectations. Her participants assumed that instructors would be more engaged and nurturing. In addition, Nuñez (2005) reported similar findings in her qualitative study of nine women of different races and ethnicities.

A growing body of research has explored how institutional factors can improve university climate and students' sense of belonging. For example, Stephens et al. (2012) divided students into two groups –one received a welcome letter that reflected interdependence and the other received a welcome letter that reflected independence. Then students were given anagrams to complete. First-generation students scored significantly worse when they read the independence letter and the same as their peers when they read the interdependence letter. Continuing generation students performed similarly in both groups. Similarly, Browman and Destin (2016) asked low-income students to comment on university brochures that either portrayed the campus as warm or chilly (with regards to financial aid availability). They found that students had more academic confidence when they experienced a warm climate.

Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) had similar findings in a natural (non-experimental) environment with 168 entering first-year, first-generation college students. The students were separated into two groups. One group listened to a panel who related their advice about college to their family and cultural backgrounds, while the other group listened to a panel who offered general advice without discussing their family and cultural backgrounds. Students who listened to the panelists who shared their cultural backgrounds, used more campus resources and earned higher grades at the end of the academic year than the group who listened to panelists

who offered general advice.

These studies demonstrated that a culturally responsive campus climate, such as one that uses storytelling as in the example above, increases success of students during their transitions to college. Similarly, Winkle-Wagner (2008) and Museus and Neville (2012) showed that students benefited from knowing that other people shared similar experiences and come from similar backgrounds. Furthermore, Hughes and Smail (2014) and Steele (2010) found that students were more pleased with activities that were interactive and in small groups rather than large lectures and they were appreciative of faculty and staff support. Still, Winkle-Wagner (2015) asserted that there is not enough research on how institutional factors influence students' success. Specifically, research is needed that explores the intersections of class, race and ethnicity, and gender.

The 4 S System of Transition

With the individual and context explained, I focus on students' transition experiences. I organize literature on students' transition experiences using Schlossberg's *4 S System* which comprises four overlapping domains: *self*, *situation*, *strategies*, and *support* (Goodman et al., 2006). *Self* characteristics are woven in to the other domains since I already described it at length in earlier sections. Furthermore, I divide support into two subsections: university support and non-university support.

Situation. The situation refers to what is happening during the transition experience. I divide the situation into subsections adapted from Goodman et al. (2006) including cultural dissonance, available time, stress, role change, and living environment (Goodman et al., 2006).

Cultural dissonance. Cultural dissonance refers to the sense of discomfort a student experiences when in a new environment and is related to a student's prior experience with other

cultures and/or similar transitions. In 2000, Kuh and Love defined the concept of cultural dissonance as the degree of difference between a students' precollege culture and the university culture. In 2009, Museus and Quaye refined the theory to account not only for students' precollege cultures but for their precollege exposure to majority cultures as well. Since then, several researchers have found that students' cultural dissonance influences their transition experiences (Jack 2014, 2016; Locks et al., 2008; McCoy, 2014; Stuber, 2011). Rendón (1992) shared her personal account of entering college and feeling isolated by the vast contrast of the higher education culture from her precollege culture. Additionally, Jack (2014) interviewed 35 working-class Black students and found that all students experienced culture shock in college but it lasted years longer for students who attended urban public schools than for students who had scholarships and attended upper-class private high schools. Furthermore, Jack (2016) found that working-class Black students who had experiences in privileged cultures had more positive experiences in college, specifically with building faculty relationships.

Berger and Milem (1999) had complimentary findings in their longitudinal study when they administered three different CIRP assessments over the course of an academic year to first-year students. The Student Information Form was issued after orientation in the summer of 1995; the Early Collegiate Experience Survey was administered in October of 1995; and the Freshman Year Survey was issued in March of 1996. They found that students who already possessed the cultural norms transitioned easier to college. Similarly, Stuber's (2011) qualitative research with working-class students showed that half of her participants reported adjusting socially and academically just fine. She noticed that these students grew up in stable or settled blue-collar households and that students who had unsettled households did not adjust as well. Thus, social class may affect students' differently depending on how closely their households are

similar to the normative White middle-class family.

Furthermore, Locks et al. (2008) found that students' precollege experiences in predominantly White environments were associated with lower perceptions of racial tension. They also found that White students from diverse precollege environments perceived more racial tension than other groups. Taken together, these studies suggest that students' precollege exposure to racially diverse environments prime them to recognize racial biases. Furthermore, they found that students' precollege experiences in predominantly White environments were negatively associated with sense of belonging for White students and positive for students of color. This suggests that students' precollege exposure to individuals from different cultures helps students have a greater sense of belonging in college. Cultural dissonance may help account for why researchers have been unable to make broad generalizations based on race or class. Most studies fail to disaggregate data by race, class, and gender much less precollege experience in upper-class and middle-class White culture.

Available Time. Researchers repeatedly have shown that having time to engage in educationally purposefully activities is a large factor to working-class students' success (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Walpole (2003) found that working-class students worked more hours than their peers. Soria et al. (2013) found that working-class students spent less time on academic activities, less time working collaboratively with students, greater time employed, and more time with family responsibilities. Stuber (2011) also identified a common theme that working-class White students had limited time to get involved during their first year. Many researchers found that working-class students were not as involved on campus (Terenzini et al., 1994; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003). Boziak (2007) looked at data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 1996 and found that low-income students who worked more than

20 hours a week were more likely to leave school during the first year compared to low-income students who worked less than 20 hours per week.

Stress. Tinto (1993) found in his extensive research on student departure that all students struggle in some way during their transition to college. Saldaña (1994) conducted a survey of 270 students and found that working-class and students of color felt higher levels of stress during college than middle-class and upper-class students. Soria, et al. (2013) also found that working-class students experienced stress and depression more than middle-class and upper-class students. Lehmann et al. (2009) discusses that financial resources can affect students' transitions to college. Furthermore, Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, and Pryor (2010) analyzed data from the 2009 Your First College Year CIRP assessment and found that 77% of first-year students reported concerns with figuring out how to pay for college.

Stephens et al. (2012) specifically found that working-class students' stress correlated with the independent cultural norms of the university. When interdependent norms were incorporated into the environment, working-class students performed equally on academic tasks as middle-class and upper-class students. Steele and Aronson (1995) and Spencer, Steele, and Quinn (1999) found similar results for women and students of color when identity threats were eliminated. Furthermore, Winkle-Wagner (2009) also found that students of color felt more stress related to maintaining relationships with both their precollege environments and their new college environment. Of particular significance, Saldaña (1994) found that students of color reported stress related to their ethnic identity more than stress related to college (Saldaña, 1994). Together, these studies show that working-class students and students of color have multiple sources of stress related to aspects of the campus structures (e.g., cost of attendance), culture (independent oriented), and climate (identity threats).

Role change. When transitioning to college, students may experience many role changes. For example, they may change from being dependent on their parents to experiencing independence for the first time. They also may experience a new role within their academic environment. For example, Wilkins (2014) found that students may have to renegotiate their roles from being popular in high school to being unnoticed in college. Nuñez (2005) found in her qualitative study of nine racially and ethnically diverse first-generation female college students that her participants' roles shifted in families during the first year in college. Her participants gained independence and felt that their parents treated them more like adults. The transition experience to college not only marks a transition into a new environment but it also marks the transition to adulthood and toward independence.

Living environment. Many researchers have found that living on campus is associated with students' success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Many working-class students who attend college live at home (Boziak, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Specifically, Boziak (2007) found that more than half of low-income students live at home with their parents during their first year of college. Students often make this decision to save money (Boziak, 2007; Stuber, 2011). Locks et al. (2008) found that living with parents was associated with lower sense of belonging. However additional research is needed as not all prior research agreed (see Robinson, Esquibel, & Rich, 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). For example, Yosso et al. (2009) found that students of color experienced a hostile racial climate in the residence halls.

Overall, the situation for working-class Latina, Black, and White female students involves a number of challenges related to the structure, culture, and climate of the university. Specifically, finances play a significant role in students' stress levels and ability to live on

campus and be engaged in educationally purposeful activities. In addition to the common challenges associated with transitioning to college, working-class female students from different races and ethnicities must face more challenges with the culture and climate of the university. This is an additional level of stress and isolation for students. Yet, many students are successful despite these challenges. Thus, research must also focus on what students draw on to be successful.

University support. A large body of research has explored that institutional agents (faculty, staff, administrators, and students) are a significant source of support for students. Bensimon (2007), Museus and Neville (2012), Museus and Quaye (2009), Stuber (2011), and Winkle-Wagner (2008) found that institutional agents build students' social capital when they have common identities and experiences and authentically taking interest in students' lives. Furthermore, Museus and Neville (2012), interviewed 60 Latina/o, Black, and Asian students from four institutions and found that students sought out institutional agents that shared similar socio-demographics or were perceived as genuine and caring. Qualities of institutional agents such as authentic caring and validation of students' experiences and identities have emerged as characteristics that support working-class students and students of color (Rendón, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Specifically, Rendón (1994) found "Success during the first year of college appears contingent upon whether students can get involved in institutional life on their own or whether external agents can validate students, in an academic and/or interpersonal way" (p. 8). Additionally, mentoring relationships have been important to female students' transition experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Winkle-Wagner (2008) found that institutional agents helped alleviate students' cultural struggles. Meanwhile, O'Shea (2013) speculated that her participants could have benefited from mentoring relationships to help them find their voices.

Her themes addressed how her participants had a lot to say, but had no one to listen.

Peer support. Peer relationships influence students' transition experiences (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hughes & Smail, 2014; Pascarella et al., 2004). Baber (2012), Harper (2006), and Stuber (2011) found peer connections to be significant during students' college experiences. Stuber (2011) also described that working-class students sought out other students who lived in the residence halls who had similar class backgrounds. Baber (2012) in his qualitative study Black students' transition experiences found that students who attended predominantly White high schools felt connected to the university through having groups of Black friends for the first time. Terenzini et al. (1994) found that peers were a source of both support and stress for first-year students. Yosso et al. (2009) also noted that the hostile racial climate for Latina students was associated with negative peer interactions in the residence halls. Finally, Arbona and Nora (2007) found that peer support during college were related to bachelor degree attainment.

Faculty support. Berger and Milem (1999), in their longitudinal survey study using national CIRP data, found that faculty involvement correlated with students who had low social integration. Berger and Milem (1999) suggested that faculty may play a critical role in the success of students who do not fit in or make friends since both faculty involvement and social integration correlated with persistence. Steele (2010) shared a personal account of how a White male faculty member who had high expectations helped him feel valued at a university where he felt uncomfortable because he was Black in a predominantly White environment. Yet, Carter et al. (2013) reported that the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement showed that less than one-third of undergraduate college students experienced significant interactions with faculty throughout their college careers. Insufficient research exists that specifically looks at faculty relationships with working-class female students of different races and ethnicities

Subcultures. Some subcultures reinforce the majority culture such as fraternities, sororities, organizations, and clubs that require high fees or expensive equipment, such as a ski club. On the other hand, some subcultures support students' specific identities such as a race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Baber (2012) conducted a qualitative study of 15 first-year Black students and found that race based campus subgroups were particularly important to their transition experiences. Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggested that students may develop a sense of belonging either at the institution or within a subculture. Thus, research on students' transition experiences that looks at campus culture and climate also must include subcultures. Harper and Quaye (2007) and Museus and Neville (2008) found that university subcultures serve as cultural enclaves for students who do not identify with the majority campus culture. Cano and Castillo (2010) particularly found that Latinas manage stress better when they have relationships with others who are from similar ethnicities. Similarly, Winkle-Wagner (2015) found that students found mentors in staff of intervention program, such as federally funded TRiO programs that are specifically for low-income, first-generation, or historically underrepresented students. Stuber (2011) also found that students who were in TRiO found mentors in the program staff.

Research overwhelmingly describes that campus subcultures and support from faculty, staff, and peers are important to the success of students of color, working-class students, and female students. However, research has not adequately addressed structural opportunities and barriers for students to connect to institutional agents or campus subgroups. Students may not connect to institutional agents or may not be involved in campus subgroups. Thus, researchers also have much to learn about how and why students built connections with institutional agents and, furthermore, how they succeed when they do not engage in campus subcultures.

Non-university support. Students may also find support in individuals and organizations that are not affiliated with the university during their transitions to college. Students especially may find support from their family members, churches, coaches, employers, friends from high school, and so on. Yosso (2005) characterizes these individuals as sources of social capital in her concept of community cultural wealth. For example, they may provide encouragement to help students emotionally manage their transitions, provide connections to employment or scholarship opportunities to help students pay for college expenses, and may provide students with cultural affirmation to feel empowered in an environment where their culture might not be as valued. Furthermore, individuals who have attended college may help students navigate institutional processes.

Family. Research about the influence of families on college student transition experiences is mixed (Jack, 2016; Terenzini et al., 1994). Some researchers have found that families are sources of stress, responsibility, and distraction (Jack, 2016; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; O'Shea, 2015; Vázquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015). Others have found that families are sources of support and encouragement (Hausmann et al., 2007; Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner, 2014; McCoy, 2014; O'Shea, 2015; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Specifically, Cano and Castillo (2010) gave a survey to 214 Latina college students and found that students who maintained connections to their families were less distressed in college. Furthermore, Hausmann et al. (2007) found that parental support and social experiences are more closely related to sense of belonging for Black students than for White students. Their study illustrates that students of different background characteristics experience college differently.

A few researchers who studied Latina college students' have been critical of families. Specifically, they have found that Latina female students may have more family responsibilities

that cause them to spend less time engaging in college than their peers (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Nuñez et al., 2013; Vázquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Vázquez-Salgado et al. (2015) found that cultural differences with family obligations could contribute to lower academic performance for Latina/os and suggested that students attend schools that are semi-far away from home to reduce family obligations. Furthermore, Kalsner and Pistole (2003) found that Latina and Black women might transition better if they separate from their families so that they do not have to fulfill as many family obligations. Of significance, these conclusions are drawn from surveys, and thus do not take into consideration students' perspectives and values. Qualitative research could gain deeper understanding of students' experiences to understand how their stress, support, and time commitments are influenced if they detach from their families. Moreover, a model of cultural wealth could challenge institutional structures to focus on adapting the educational experiences so that students could feel supported in meeting family obligations while enrolled in institutions of higher education.

A few researchers sought to understand different types of parental support. For example, Vega, Moore, and Miranda (2015) found that parental support operates differently for working-class students than it does for middle-class and upper-class students. Working-class parents demonstrate support through encouragement rather than by attending functions, navigating processes, and so on. Difference can be attributed to parents lacking time, transportation, and knowledge of institutions processes. Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) had similar findings. They conducted a qualitative study of Black women's transition experiences to college using a non-deficit framework and found that found family support was helpful to all students' transitions; however, parents supported their daughters' autonomy in different ways. For example, all parents encouraged autonomy in some way. Yet, some parents did not have

experiences with colleges and others did not have the financial resources to support students. Narrower definitions of support might lead a less astute observer to conclude that students did have non-supportive families because their families could not offer financial assistance or navigational insights. Additional research using community cultural wealth or non-deficit frameworks is warranted to similarly explore the social capital of working-class female students and students from different races and ethnicities.

Friends. Working-class students may experience stress about maintaining relationships from high school and their communities after they enter college. A few studies found that students felt they talked differently, had different views, or had different goals than they did before they started college (Aries & Seider, 2005). They also expressed concerns that friends from home who did not go to college would try to hinder their success in college (Aries & Seider, 2005). In addition, Stuber (2009, 2011) found that students who maintain friendships with high school friends have more trouble socially adjusting to college. Meanwhile, Nuñez (2005) found that seven of her nine participants reported that friendships from high school were important to their transitions to college. However, these students also were enrolled in college. Thus, research suggests that students are more successful when they are associated with peers who attend college. Additional research that uses a community cultural wealth framework could lead to deeper understanding of how students' precollege peer relationships influence their transitions to college.

Community. A students' precollege community could include their teachers, coaches, churches, community organizations, and so on. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that participation in religious organizations and social-community organizations positively contributed to Latina/o students' sense of belonging. Meanwhile, Baber (2012) found, in his

qualitative research on the transition experiences of 15 Black first-year students, that a few students struggled to reengage in their churches after starting college because it no longer aligned with their values. Moreover, he found that students struggled to fit in to their communities overall. Research on students' precollege communities has been incidental without strong consideration of how communities can contribute to students' success.

Strategies. Strategies are how students cope with or manage the transition. Students use agency when they employ a strategy to manage the transition. Goodman et al. (2006) described three primary strategies that individuals use to deal with change including modifying the situation, controlling meeting, or controlling the situation. Researchers have not specifically examined what students draw on to navigate their transitions; however, some qualitative studies offer some insights. Additionally, the literature overall provides some conceptual understanding of students' strategies.

Modify the situation. Students may modify the situation by ending their participation in a group, moving to a new residence hall room, or withdrawing from school altogether. Students may not have the time, finances, or desire to participate in some environments. As illustrated earlier, dropout rates for working-class students are much higher than middle and upper-class students (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Unfortunately, very few studies have looked at the experiences of students who have dropped out of college. I found no articles that captured the experiences of students who eventually dropped out during their first year of college. Unfortunately, the body of research on students' transitions is missing the experiences of students who do not continue enrollment at the institution.

Control meaning. Students may manage the situation by changing the meaning they give to the situation. If students find a class too difficult, they may decide that it does not matter

because they will pursue a different career. Furthermore, students may not be aware that they are managing the meaning of what they say. For example, Stuber (2011) found that many of her participants did not believe that social class matters. Stuber (2011) suggested that students wanted to fit in and did not want to see themselves as marginalized. Thus, they overlooked or minimized barriers because they did not want others to define what they could achieve in college. A critical realist perspective, which examines both students' perspectives and experiences, can help contextualize how students make meaning of their situations.

Control the situation. Students may manage the situation by seeking support, information, or acting. The previous section examined students' common sources of support. In addition to seeking support, students take control of situations in many other ways. Arzy et al. (2006), Terenzini et al. (1994), and Walpole (2003) found that working-class students focused almost solely on academics and, consequently, did not get involved on campus. Working-class students may try to control their academic success and may not identify campus engagement as a means to achieve their goals. Researchers have also suggested that working-class students may study less than their peers because they have less time to devote to educational activities. Thus, students may try to control their situation of having less financial resources and potentially less academic preparation. Qualitative approaches could bring greater understanding of reasons why students employ these strategies, how prevalent students use these strategies, or perhaps ways students are engaged that administrators and researchers have not yet recognized.

Students may also control their situation by changing majors, joining organizations, participating in subgroups, or engaging in high impact practices. Stuber (2011) found that a subset of her participants who originally felt alienated joined subgroups to find a sense of belonging. When students manage their situations, they use their agency to make changes. As

stated earlier, students are not victims. Using this perspective, researchers must seek to understand students' experiences and decisions, rather than evaluating whether their decision was good or bad. Research that uses a community cultural wealth framework avoids portraying students as victims.

Additional research is warranted to develop deeper understanding about how students manage college and how students make decisions**.** For example, researchers have assumed that working-class students do not participate in high impact practices because they do not have time (Pascarella et al., 2005) and because they are focused solely on academics (Terenzini et al., 1994). However, students may have additional explanations. Perhaps they are more focused and goal-oriented. Perhaps they see college only as a means to gain education and not a place to develop relationships and participate in social events. They may use resistant capital so they do not adopt the dominant culture while they work toward their educational goals. Thus, they may not find activities and events on campus to be meaningful. Sims (2008), for example, found that African American female students were successful in college despite not engaging in university activities.

Outcomes

In a cultural wealth model, student described outcomes must be understood as institutionally defined outcomes are ascribed in the majority culture. Yet, few studies explore student determined outcomes. Winkle-Wagner (2015) conducted a literature review of Black women college students and found narrow definitions of success in the literature. Furthermore, Rendón (2006) criticized higher education research for the lack of focus on students' definitions of success.

Student defined outcomes. One study, in particular, examined students' measures of success. O'Shea (2013) found that students found confidence in themselves during their transitions to college. Furthermore, they started questioning aspects of their lives that they had taken for granted. O'Shea's participants primarily consisted of adult working-class women; therefore, they may not be representative of the experiences of students who have just graduated high school. Carpenter and Peña (2016) interviewed 14 juniors and seniors with low social class and found that participants achieved self-authorship in greater percentages than their higher social class peers. Baxter-Magolda (2008) has defined self-authorship as a person's "internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (p. 269). Although self-authorship is not a student defined outcome, it validates O'Shea's (2013) research that students find their voices and feel in control of their lives. With self-authorship, working-class students are likely to define aspects of their experiences in terms of their own goals. Thus, this area is ripe for additional research to understand what matters to Latina, Black, and White working-class female students during their transitions to college.

Institutional measures of success. According to Kuh et al. (2007), student success is commonly marked by "academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies; persistence; attainment of educational objectives" and post-university performance (p. 10). Researchers have found that working-class students have less success than their peers in many of these institutionally defined outcomes. For example, they have lower GPAs (Walpole, 2003) and lower status career outcomes (Walpole, 2003). Furthermore, Walpole (2003) showed that upper-class students attended graduate school at higher rates than working-class students even if their GPAs were lower. These findings do not hold for middle-class and upper-class students. This

illustrates that students advance in education for reasons other than academic performance. Furthermore, institutional outcomes may reflect an individualistic culture and largely ignore outcomes related to interdependence and collaboration (Rendón, 2006). Thus, institutional outcomes largely represent acquisition of the dominant culture of the institution. Yet, when data are disaggregated by both race and class, Black and Latina/o working-class students are more likely to persist than White working-class students (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Perhaps people who are Black and Latina/o are more accustomed to being in culturally incongruent environments; thus, they have more resistant and navigational capital that advances their success.

Furthermore, Walpole (2003) found when social class and SAT scores are controlled, Black students attend graduate schools at higher rates than White students. Perhaps the students' community cultural wealth associated with their racial identity led to their increased success. Yet, lack of capital associated with their social class still led to lower graduate school attendance than their White peers. This example illustrates that examining intersecting identities is important to understanding students' experiences.

Learning. Another way to measure success is to focus on learning, rather than what milestones students completed (Rendón, 2006). In my conceptual framework, I proposed that students will gain knowledge and skills from learning during their first semester of college. When looking at learning outcomes, findings disaggregated by race and ethnicity, social class, and gender do not paint a clear picture. For example, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-generation students who persisted scored higher than non-first-generation students on locus of control and higher order cognitive thinking skills.

Unfortunately, Perna and Thomas (2008) found in their review of research that very few studies looked specifically at learning outcomes. As illustrated above, many factors related to

students' identities, rather than their knowledge and skills, have been assessed. However, these indicators describe very little about how well institutions achieve their missions to educate students and advance knowledge. Rendón (2006) suggested that universities should look at outcomes associated with the "whole person" including advancing students' language, interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, compassion, empathy, lifelong learning, global citizenship, and developing purpose in life (p. 21). Such outcomes would be more culturally inclusive and responsive to students' diverse educational needs.

Summary

In Chapter I, I posed the persistent and growing problem of social class inequity in higher education. I also explained why research is necessary that examines students' transition experiences using a framework of community cultural wealth to examine structural barriers in higher education. My literature review and conceptual framework, modeled from Schlossberg's transition model, summarized key research on students' transition experiences. In this structure, I incorporated aspects of students' identities, university environments, and the transition process.

Many researchers have explored key factors of my conceptual framework. Although prior research is valuable to helping me understand students' experiences, I have found that prior research offers an incomplete picture of working-class students, specifically Latina, Black, and White female working-class students. I have found no qualitative study that has sufficiently disentangled race and ethnicity, social class, and gender when examining college students' experiences. Furthermore, research on working-class students often does not include culturally inclusive findings or recommendations (see O'Shea 2013, 2015; Stuber 2009, 2011). Rendón (2006) asserted that research that does include students of multiple and intersecting identities is often framed in the context of the majority culture. Additionally, when researchers do not

account for both race and social class, they do not sufficiently address students' multifaceted experiences or quell assumptions not grounded in empirical evidence. For example, in quantitative studies, race is often a predictor for students' success. However, evidence shows, for example, that high achieving Black and Latina students do better than high achieving White students (Walpole, 2003). Meanwhile, the normative belief, that Black and Latina/o students experience less success in college than White students, continues.

In many studies, students' identities are highlighted and the institutional structures are widely ignored. Rendón (2006) suggests that most research that examines campus structures lacks depth of analysis. Research that focuses on students' race and ethnicity often includes findings related to institutional agents, mentoring, and campus subcultures and avoids addressing more pervasive structural problems (Rendón, 2006). Previous research has not adequately looked at students' experiences using frameworks that addresses the complexity of working-class students' interactions with universities.

This literature review and conceptual framework guided my inquiry to examine the institutional structure, through the perspective of students who experience least success, to guide institutional administrators and policymakers toward approaches that are culturally inclusive and responsive to an increasingly diverse student body. By interviewing students from a single institution, I engaged in complex comparisons of the experiences of students who had multiple and intersecting identities. Furthermore, by employing Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, I reframed the experiences of students, who are often acknowledged for their deficits, so their experiences and perspectives are described in a culturally validating manner. By reframing students' experiences using Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, I took a step forward toward challenging the institutional structure, specifically the culture and

climate, to be more inclusive and supportive of all students' success. I believe that working-class students have qualities that guide their success, but might be overlooked or misunderstood in higher education. Thus, I sought to identify these characteristics and understand how they may be assets to students' success.

By identifying students' community cultural wealth, I not only sought to validate students' experiences and perspectives, but sought to I offer university administrators and policymakers direct paths to supporting students' success through their assets, rather than indirect paths via students' deficits.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

My methodological decisions were guided by the philosophical position of critical realism. Maxwell (2012) describes tenants of critical realism that guide the research process. They are:

- Mental phenomena, "meanings, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, values, and intentions," although unobservable, are real. In other words, they are not simply abstractions of behaviors. They are real and are involved in producing behavior and social relationships (Maxwell, 2012, p. 16).
- Culture is real; it is not an abstraction. It can be explained by mental phenomena, and thus must be inferred rather than observed (p. 26).
- Diversity is real, and thus should not be minimized or overlooked in research. For examples, when examining culture, aspects that do not fit should not be viewed as outliers or as secondary. Rather, they are important and representative of diversity.
- Finally, not all aspects of a culture will necessarily be shared among all of individuals who live within it. However, it is participated in. Thus, great diversity exists within a culture; furthermore, subcultures may exist within a culture.

With this philosophy, I tried to understand both students' perspectives as well as structural factors that may have influenced their experiences, of which they may not have fully been aware. For example, a student might say that her experience is not influenced by her gender, but her experiences may suggest otherwise. The student might seek female mentors, join a sorority, or live in a female residence hall. Therefore, I tried to account for students' perceptions when I offered evidence that contrasted with their accounts of their experiences.

Although my research could not possibly be a complete representation of objective reality, I hoped to deepen understanding of experiences of working-class female students of different races and ethnicities at a four-year urban university. Specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

(1) How do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experience the campus culture and climate at a large urban four-year public university?

(2) What do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students draw on to navigate the transition from high school to a large urban four-year public university?

(3) How do these factors (what students draw on and the campus culture and climate) influence their success during their first semester of college?

(4) What differences, if any, are there between the transition experiences of working-class female students based on race or ethnicity?

I begin this section with an explanation of my methodological approach and how it fit within my conceptual framework. I then describe my research design and method, site and participant selection, and data collection procedures. I also discuss the nature of my relationships with the participants and my own subjectivity. Next, I provide details of how I protected, stored, organized, and analyzed data. Finally, I discuss how I accounted for issues of validity.

Methodological Approach

My study warranted a qualitative approach to gain depth of understanding of the cultural aspects of students' transitions from high school to an urban four-year university. According to Maxwell (2013), qualitative research can lead to better understanding of the perspectives of people being studied, how their perspectives shape and are shaped by different contexts, and the

processes that influence phenomena and relationships. My study addressed all three areas as I sought to understand the perspectives of working-class Latina, Black, and White female students toward college, how their perspectives functioned within the university context, and how their community cultural wealth influenced their transition to the university. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) have suggested that "The 4 S System provides a way to identify the potential resources someone possesses to cope with the transition" (p. 32). Since my research focused on students' resources, an aspect of community cultural wealth, I used Schlossberg's transition model to frame my research approach (Goodman et al., 2006).

Students' perspectives toward college fall within the *self* domain of the 4 S System. The *self* domain is comprised of "personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 65). Thus, in my study I sought to understand students' unique identities (race, gender, social class), backgrounds (community cultural wealth), knowledge and skills, and agency.

The context of students' transition experiences, the university, is shaped by the organizational environment, including the culture and climate. Cooke (as cited in Goodman et al., 2006) specifically addressed that structural inequities—such as those described in Bourdieu's (1977/1990) theory of social reproduction and Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth—are a part of the context of the transition, and influence all aspects of the 4 S System. My study specifically sought to understand the culture and climate of the university through the perspective of the participants. Thus, my first research question, *how do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experience the campus culture and climate at a large urban four-year public university*, explored the context of the participants' transition experiences.

My second research question, *what do Latina, Black, and White female working-class*

students draw on to navigate the transition to a large urban four-year public university, focused on what assets and resources students use in their transitions to college. The 4 S System served as a tool to evaluate four domains of resources: *support, self, situation, strategies*. Goodman et al. (2006) have described each domain as an accumulation of assets, liabilities, resources, and deficiencies that influence the transition. For example, participants may have many or few family, friends, or institutional agents, to whom they turn to for support and then for whom may offer different types or degrees of *support*. Within the *self* domain, participants' identities and backgrounds may shape their transition to college and they may have varying levels of agency from which to draw. Their *situations* may differ depending on family responsibilities, prior experiences with similar cultures, financial resources, and so on. Furthermore, participants may use different *strategies* to manage transitions. For example, a student who feels uncomfortable speaking to instructors may manage the experience by rationalizing that the conversation is an investment in their success, change the situation by avoiding talking to the instructor altogether, or manage the situation by enduring discomfort and expressing anxiety to friends afterwards. When collecting data, I looked at all aspects of the 4 S System. During the data analysis phase, I identified aspects of their transition that serve as assets or resources to construct their community cultural wealth.

Furthermore, I looked at the outcomes of the working-class participants' transition experiences with my third research question, *how do these factors (campus culture and climate, personal and demographic characteristics, and resources) influence their success during their first semester of college?* I frame their transition experiences not only with respect to institutional markers of success, such as grade point average, credits earned, and persistence, but also relative to how students defined success. Success could also be marked by changes in their

skills, knowledge, agency, and notions of their identity.

Finally, I examined their transitions to college with respect to race and ethnicity to answer my fourth research question, *what differences, if any, are there between students of different races and ethnicities*? This question sought to capture a nuanced understanding of students' experiences in college that disentangles social class from race and ethnicity while capturing aspects of students' intersectional identities.

Multiple Case Study Design

For this study, I used a multiple case study approach drawing on the work of Stake (2000) and Yin (2014), two qualitative researchers who have each written extensively about case study designs for over 20 years. Stake (2000) defined case studies as "stages in the life of a person or program or anything that can be defined as a specific, unique, bounded system" (p. 436). Yin (2014) expanded on this definition offering that case studies take into account many constructs, different sources to collect data, and theory to guide data collection and analysis. This approach is appropriate for my study since my research will be bounded by a particular place (an urban university) and time (the summer before college through the first semester of college) and seeks to improve in-depth understanding of first-year working-class female students' experiences by using Schlossberg's transition model and Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth.

Furthermore, Yin (2014) has indicated that research questions that are exploratory in nature are appropriate for case study research. My study is exploratory as I sought to understand what support, strategies, and aspects of self and situations working-class female students draw on to navigate the transition from high school to college. Yin (2014) also suggested that case studies are the preferred method "when (1) the main research questions are 'how' or 'why'

questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of the study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon" (p. 2). My study met all criteria as I also sought to understand how working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experienced the campus culture and climate of an urban four-year public university.

I specifically used a multiple case study design to answer my research questions. Stake (2006) has stated that, in multi-case research, cases must be similar in some ways and share a common phenomenon. This study included cases of Latina, Black, and White female students who were from working-class families and sought to understand the common phenomena of their transition from high school to college. With the multiple case study design, each participant was a unique case which allowed for the diversity of experiences to be captured within the common phenomena. Additionally, Tierney (as cited in Stake, 2006) emphasized that case studies should give adequate attention to entities outside the case environment that may influence the cases. This aspect was central to my study as I sought to directly explore entities beyond college, such as family, friends, and community members that influence students' transitions to college. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, specifically her concepts of social and familial capital, and Schlossberg's support domain in the 4 S System would help frame these influences on the participants' transitions.

Interview Method

Stake (2000) reasoned that many methodological approaches could be used for case studies since the focus is on understanding the cases. Since I was interested in the context of students' transition experiences, I conducted interviews. According to Patton (2002), interviews allow researchers to "get beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts" (p. 306). Specifically, I used semi-structured interviews that addressed all research questions, yet, allowed

for follow-up questions to capture depth in how participants made sense of their experiences. An interview guide was used for each series of interviews.

Since I sought to understand a process—students' transitions to college—I used a longitudinal design to collect data at multiple points during each participant's transition. Glesne (2011) shared that time spent building rapport with participants is a major factor in acquiring trustworthy data. Thus, the longitudinal design also helped me gain richer understanding of the working-class female participants' experiences as they became more comfortable as the study continued. I also used interview questions that were recursive with a subset of questions that were similar in each series of questions. In later interviews, I asked participants to reflect on their earlier responses. Thus, my data collection included multiple impressions of their experiences at different points in their transitions.

Site Selection

The primary criterion I used to select a site was to identify a large urban public university that had an expressed commitment to serving historically underserved students. Urban universities often play substantial roles in their cities by providing education, engaging in research, and fostering economic development. Thus, they have direct opportunities to improve equitable outcomes for working-class students. I selected an institution, which I refer to as Large Urban University [LUU] because it has many characteristics that make it suitable to study the phenomena of the transition experiences of female working-class students of diverse race and ethnicities. LUU had an admission rate of 74% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and is centered in a large, diverse metropolitan areas of the United States. The city faced many challenges associated with social class with racial disparities, poverty, police violence, shootings, distrust in public institutions, and civil unrest. Amidst these stifling challenges, Large Urban

University had a mission to address urban challenges in the community.

A substantial number of students came from working-class families with 55% of students receiving Pell grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). LUU was also designated as a Hispanic serving institution (HSI). For an institution to be designated as an HSI, at least 25% of their full-time undergraduate student enrollment must be Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, in 2015, the university ranked as one of the most diverse campuses in the United States by U.S. News and World Report (Morse, 2015). Yet, as illustrated in Figure 3, the institution's racial and ethnic diversity did not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the city. Latina/o and Black students were underrepresented at the university compared to cities demographics. The statistics are particularly troubling for Black students who comprised one-third of population within the city but less than one-tenth of the student population.

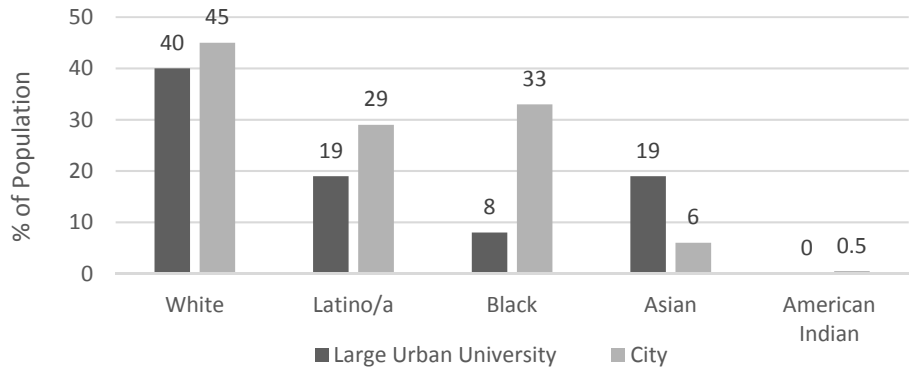

Figure 3. Percent of All Large Urban University Students by Race/Ethnicity in 2014 Compared to City Population in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; U.S. Census, 2010)

Additionally, Figure 4 shows race and ethnic disparities at Large Urban University with Latina/o and Black students experiencing less success than Asian and White students as measured by 6-year graduation rates. Although the university showed great commitment to

equity in education, students were not experiencing equitable outcomes. Yet, when compared to all four-year public institutions in the United States, LUUs graduation rates disaggregated by race and ethnicity were similar. Considering that 51% of students receive Pell Grants, LUU has performed relatively well (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The national 6-year graduation rates for low-income students is 12% (Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016). Thus, LUU was a prime university to explore how female working-class students of diverse races and ethnicities experienced the institutional culture and climate and to understand what they drew on to navigate college.

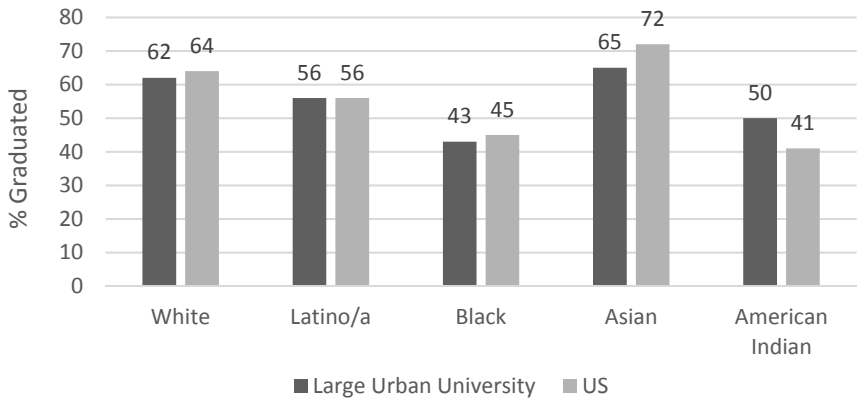

Figure 4. Six-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity for 2008 cohort of full-time, first-year degree seeking undergraduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Participant Selection

Stake (2006) has suggested three criteria for selecting cases: relevance to the phenomena, diversity across contexts, and opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts. My study met all three criteria as I selected racially and ethnically diverse participants whose experiences were framed by the cultural and economic contexts of race and ethnicity, class, and gender. In the United States, working-class and poor communities have disproportionate representation of people of color. Furthermore, researchers often conflate issues of class with race (see Bettie,

2003/2014). To understand the unique and shared experiences of working-class students, I sought adequate representation of different races and ethnicities. I did not want to mistakenly attribute racial differences as working-class phenomena or, conversely, that characteristics of working-class students of one race or ethnicity apply to all working-class students. Furthermore, only two races or ethnicities would have provided a dichotomous contrast that would not sufficiently disentangle race from class. Thus, I selected three races and ethnicities for my study.

With demographic information about the city and LUU in mind, I decided to focus on Latina, Black, and White students. The data suggested that Latina and Black students were underrepresented at the university, compared to the demographics of city, and experienced less success, as measured by graduation rates, than their peers at the university. Thus, I thought it was particularly important to understand their experiences. Additionally, I selected White students who, as a group, experience more success in college; however, when data are disaggregated by class, White students have lower graduation rates (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2003). Overall, studying Latina, Black, and White students allowed me to better understand working-class students' many types of cultural wealth as understood through race and ethnicity.

Additionally, I chose to focus on the experiences of women. Gender has been found to influence college majors (Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000), transition experiences (Allen, 1992), persistence (Paulsen & St. John, 2002), graduate school enrollment (Perna, 2004), and earnings after graduation (Webster & Bishaw, 2007). Although working-class males of different races and ethnicities also experience less success than their peers, women's experiences are different from men's and thus warrant separate attention (Buchmann, 2009; O'Shea, 2015). As such, I selected participants who were female Latina, Black, and White working-class students

who were transitioning from high school to college.

Stake (2006) has recommended that multi-case studies include more than four cases to show enough interactivity but no more than 10 to avoid more variation than can be understood. He also suggests that there is often good reason to select more than 15 cases (Stake, 2006). I used these reference points to determine an appropriate sample size for my study. I not only sought enough participants to have representation of Latina, Black, and White students, but I also sought to capture unique experiences among participants of each race and ethnicity. Although differences between racial and ethnic groups are well-documented, research has illustrated great variation within racial groups (see Baber, 2012; Harper, 2006; and Maxwell, 2012). Thus, to achieve saturation and representation, I sought a minimum of five participants from three races and ethnicities for a total of 15 participants. Furthermore, since I intended to collect data while participants were experiencing the phenomena, I needed to account for the possibility that some of participants would leave the university. With the university's first to second year retention rate being 73% for Black students and 80% for Latina and White students, I intended to select 21 participants, seven of each race and ethnicity.

I recruited 18 Latina working-class students and I selected the first seven that passed the screening, describe below, to participate in my study. Meanwhile I only recruited three Black and two White participants who met the screening criteria. I partially attribute this to there being only 8% of Black students total at LUU. I speculate that since the university is 40% White, low-income White students may not be actively recruited. The campus population of White students may be more represented with middle and upper-class White students. Furthermore, college students of historically underrepresented races and ethnicities are more likely to be of working-class (Douglas & Thomson, 2012; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2007). Another possibility is that

working-class White students may believe they are in the middle-class (Stuber, 2011; Wilkins, 2014) or they may have not read my recruitment announcements thoroughly and assumed that it was only for students of color. Stuber (2011) found in her qualitative study of 26 working-class White college students that White students assumed that programs for first-generation students were for students of color.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data from August of 2016 through February of 2017. In this section, I describe the procedures I used to collect data.

Permission to Conduct Research

At the recommendation of my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I initially contacted the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs to request permission to conduct research at LUU. To establish a connection, I asked a colleague who previously worked at the institution to make the introduction. The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs granted me permission to conduct research and connected me to the Director of Student Engagement and Assessment who assisted me in recruitment.

Recruitment and Screening

After receiving permission to conduct research with administrators and institutional review boards, I began recruitment of participants. In July of 2016, I worked with the administrators of the university's Facebook Class of 2020 page to post a recruitment message introducing new LUU students to my study and requesting their participation. A LUU staff member posted the announcement on my behalf once a week for three weeks. The posting included information about my study and my contact information and it included a link to a brief screening tool.

The initial posting generated five eligible participants. The second posting generated one eligible participant. With low turnout, I created one more Facebook post and contacted the campus administrator who worked with precollege programs. I sought his permission and got an IRB amendment to send out a recruitment message to students who participated in precollege programs. I also speculated that some students might not identify themselves as a part of the working-class. Therefore, in this announcement, I added low-income in addition to working-class in my recruitment letter. This recruitment announcement produced another eight participants. Many more students were interested but they were Latina and I already recruited the maximum number of Latina students for my research design. During the first two weeks of classes I attempted to see if faculty would send my announcement to their class lists to get more White and Black students. However, I was unable to get permission from LUU's IRB to send this announcement. Of the 14 participants who met the criteria, two potential participants did not reply to my interview requests, leaving me with a total of 12 participants.

Participants who expressed interest in the study filled out a brief screening form. The form consisted of six multiple choice questions (see Appendix A) including their age, gender, race or ethnicity, when they completed high school, and the occupational category and educational level of the individuals who raised them. They also provided their name, email, and phone number to participate.

Hollingshead's Index of Social Position was used to operationalize working-class via categories of occupation and education (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958). It has been found to be a close representation of class with scaled categories for education level and occupation (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958). They created the scale so researchers could quickly and easily identify an individual's social class based on a few symbolic factors associated with social

position. In their study of families in New Haven, Connecticut, they developed a scale where education and occupation were strongly correlated (r = .91) to participants' qualitatively evaluated social class position (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958). Since then, the Hollingshead Index of Social Position has been used extensively in sociological and educational studies to determine social class (Baber, 2012; Miller, Ostrove, & Long, 2007).

Table 3

Hollingshead's Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 2011/1975)

Scale	**Score**
Level of school completed	
Less than seventh grade	1
Middle school (7th to 9th grade)	2
Some high school (10th or 11th grade)	3
High school graduate	4
Some college (at least one year) or specialized training	5
Four-year college degree	6
Graduate or professional degree	7
Occupational title	
Farm laborers/Service workers	1
e.g., janitor, maid, personal service attendant, farm laborer	
Unskilled workers	2
e.g., bartender, busser, nanny, laborer, wait staff, garbage worker	
Machine operators and semiskilled workers	3
e.g., bus driver, caretaker, machine operator, truck drivers, service workers	
Smaller business owners, skilled manual workers, craftsmen, tenant farmers	4
e.g., low ranking military officer, carpenter, mail carrier, plumber, receptionist	
Clerical and sales workers, small farm and business owners	5
e.g., bank teller, cashier, dental assistant, clerical worker, bill collector	
Technicians, semiprofessionals, small business owners	6
e.g., secretary, sales manager, technician, teacher aide, military sergeant	
Smaller business owners, farm owners, managers, minor professionals	7
e.g., insurance agent, artist, manager, social worker, elementary school teacher	
Administrators, lesser professionals, proprietors of medium sized businesses	8
e.g., IT, accountant, nurse, professor, high school teacher, school administrator	
High executives, proprietors of large businesses, and major professionals	9
e.g., CEO, vice president, lawyer, physician, senator, financial manager	

Hollingshead (2011/1975) also created a four-factor index that included marital status

and sex to account for changing family dynamics and gender norms. In this index, Hollingshead averaged the scores for married individuals and used one person's scores for single, divorced, single-income, or widowed families. Additionally, Hollingshead modified the weight of the scales to account for societal changes since the first study. Since participants had not yet begun careers, I would not have been able to calculate their social class using their information. Rather, I determined participants' social class by asking them about the social position of the individuals who predominantly raised the participants. Thus, I used a modified version of Hollingshead's Four Factor Index of Social Position by using the average occupation and education scores for individuals who were predominantly involved in raising my potential participants. This framing allowed me to account for unique, blended, and multi-generational families.

The education scale ranges from seven (graduate/professional degree) to one (less than seven years of school). The occupation scale ranges from nine (e.g., executives) to one (e.g., janitors). Higher scores indicate higher social positions. To compute social position, the education score is multiplied by three and the occupation score is multiplied by five. These scores are added together. Scores were computed for each person who raised potential participants and then averaged to get a single social position score that could range from 8 to 66. Scores of 39 and below represented working-class.

As potential participants completed the screening form, I reviewed the form and computed their social position. If the student graduated high school within the past year, was over the age of 18 and female, scored 39 or below on the Hollingshead Index of Social Position (2011/1975), and was of a race or ethnicity included in this study, she was asked to participate.

Protection of Human Subjects

For all interviews, I adhered to my interview protocol (see Appendix C) and obtained

informed consent prior to screening and data collection. I provided a memo to participants that described the study, explained that risks will be no greater than what they might encounter in everyday life, stated that their participation was voluntary and discontinued participation would in no way result in negative academic outcomes, explained compensation, and requested their signed consent to participate in the study. Data collection did not begin until their questions were answered and they read and signed the consent form.

Participants were compensated for their participation with fifteen-dollar gift cards to the campus bookstore after each face-to-face interview. Although evidence that incentives increase participation rates is limited (Patton, 2015), I believe that small compensation demonstrated respect for participants' time as I anticipated that many participants would have had to work many hours or had additional responsibilities when they were not in class. At the same time, the compensation was small so that it did not compromise the research relationship by coercing participation or pitying their circumstances.

Interview Setting

An academic support office allowed me to reserve a private conference room to conduct interviews during the day without interruption. Some participants could only meet during the evening so I reserved a library study room to conduct evening interviews. I was careful not to select places on campus where a power disparity was evident, such as an administrator's office, to avoid creating conditions that could have a chilling effect on participants.

Questionnaire

To supplement the interview data, I asked participants to fill out a brief demographics questionnaire prior to their first interview after they had given consent to participate in the study (see Appendix B). The questionnaires helped me efficiently gather data that might be relevant to

their transition experiences. Some questions pertained to aspects of their transition that I was not directly interested in studying, but which other researchers have found to be important to students' transitions and success such as ACT score and high school GPA. This questionnaire served as a means for me to explore counter-explanations and theories during the data analysis process. It allowed me to compare my findings to research that offered alternate explanations by allowing me to reframe participants' responses using the data I collected in the questionnaire but had not asked about in the interviews. Overall, the questionnaire helped increase the rigor of my study as it served as a mechanism to help me challenge subtle biases. Furthermore, it falls within the critical realist paradigm as I sought to obtain a closer understanding of objective reality.

I also used the questionnaire to understand participants' self-reported perceptions. For example, a participant may have stated she is not intelligent compared to others in her class; however, she may have earned a high ACT score or high school GPA. This would propel me to ask her more questions to better understand this seeming contradiction. Ultimately, the questionnaire added depth to my understanding of the working-class female students' perceptions and strengthened my findings.

Interviews

Yin (2014) has suggested that the time intervals align with the stages when changes should reveal themselves. Thus, my first set of interviews occurred the week before classes through the first week of classes, before participants were fully immersed in the college environment. Thus, this interview primarily gathered background information and perceptions about college. I conducted 11 of 12 first interviews before classes started. One participant, Jane, was recruited after the first round so her first and second interviews were conducted on the same day during the fifth week of classes. During the first interview, I gathered information related to

students' assets, liabilities, resources, and deficiencies as laid out in Schlossberg's 4 S System (Goodman et al. 2006). For example, I asked about the *self* domain by asking about their backgrounds (e.g., family, culture) and experiences (e.g., school, church, neighborhood) to understand their community cultural wealth. I also asked about their expectations and perspectives about college. For the situation domain, I asked about their income, family responsibilities, work and extracurricular experiences, academic preparation, and so on. For the support domain, I asked about who or what influenced their choice to attend college. For the strategy domain, I asked about what challenges and opportunities they anticipated and how they intended to manage them. Additionally, I asked them about what success was to them to help me understand their expectations and goals during their transition to college.

My second set of interviews occurred during the fifth and sixth weeks of classes when students were still forming impressions about college. During these interviews, I asked questions to help me understand how they experienced the campus culture and climate. Hurtado and Carter (1997) described that an individual's perception of group cohesion can be described as ones' sense of belonging. Thus, to understand participants' perspectives about the campus culture and climate, I asked about their sense of belonging. Specifically, I asked them if they feel like they belonged and if they felt as though they were a part of the campus community. Additionally, I asked them about challenges and successes they faced. I also asked them about what they drew on to navigate college—including challenges and successes—using Schlossberg's four S's to frame the questions (Goodman et al., 2006). Finally, I asked them to reflect on their responses during the first interview to understand how their initial impressions may or may not have changed.

I conducted the third interview toward the end of the semester to gain understanding of

participants' experience after they became accustomed to the college experience. By this time, they had the opportunity to experience the pace of college, understand academic expectations, interact with faculty, staff, and peers, and adjust their roles with their families and others from their precollege environments. During this interview, my questions were similar to those I asked during the second interview. I also asked them to reflect on their prior interviews to understand if their initial impressions may or may not have changed.

Finally, I engaged in brief, 10-minute follow-up phone interviews in February, after they completed the first semester, to ask about their academic performance including their GPA, credits earned, and current attendance. I used this interview to clarify my understanding of statements they shared in earlier interviews. Unfortunately, one participant, Jane, did not respond to my multiple requests to conduct an interview. Thus, 11 of 12 participants completed the final phone interview.

In May of 2015, I conducted two pilot interviews of working-class female students who completed their first year of attendance at another urban university. One student identified as Latina and the other Black. These interviews provided me valuable insights about what questions to ask to gain deep insightful responses. I modeled my interview guide questions for this study from these pilot interviews.

Research Relationships

I sought to develop trustworthy relationships with participants. In the critical realist philosophy, research relationships are real phenomena and must be appropriately considered in the study as they influence the quality of data (Maxwell, 2012). At the beginning of the data collection process, I understood that participants would not automatically trust me and might hesitate to fully express themselves. For 10 participants, I was of a different race or ethnicity

and I had to demonstrate that I was trustworthy and capable of grasping their experiences. I managed this by being authentic and showing genuine interest in their experiences. Additionally, if they struggled to find the right words or if I sensed that they were holding back, I would ask follow-up questions to give them an opportunity to clarify their perceptions or emotions. My conceptual framework also helped create conditions that allowed for building trust since my focus is on cultural wealth.

I also recognized the inherent power differential between participants and me. I was older than them and I may have been perceived to be of middle or upper-class. My role as a researcher also put me in a position of power. Maxwell (2012) has shared that this dynamic should not be minimized and must be accounted for in the research process. The power differential demonstrates the importance of treating participants with dignity and respect. I tried to be mindful not to attempt to shape their impressions about college by asking leading or presumptuous questions. Furthermore, with a position of power, I also assumed a level of responsibility for the participant. For example, I was prepared to step out of my role as a researcher and take appropriate action to care for the participants' health and well-being by walking the participant to a counseling center if a participant was overcome with emotion or expressed self-harm. Fortunately, I did not have to do this for any participants. However, I did strongly suggest that one person visit the financial aid office after her third interview as I knew that she was facing a structural barrier that would have resulted in a very large financial burden. I describe this in more detail in the next chapter.

My personal experiences as a working-class student who attended an urban public high school helped me establish trust as I may have been more in tuned to social nuances. Additionally, I have many professional experiences that have led me to establish rapport with

students of different races and ethnicities from working-class families including teaching in urban public high schools, working in a TRiO program that served low-income, first-generation, and historically under-represented college students, and serving as a resource and advocate for college students faced with crises. I understood that building trust does not happen immediately and cannot be forced (Berger, 2013). Thus, I took an interviewing approach that was authentic, respectful, caring, and patient. As the relationships grew, I achieved greater depth in understanding participants' perceptions since I had some familiarity with the complexity of emotions that they felt.

Subjectivity

My personal identity and experiences, which may have helped me build relationships with participants as described above, similarly worked as biases. Maxwell (2012) explained that critical realists recognize the unavoidable subjectivity of the researcher. Furthermore, Maxwell (2012) suggested that subjectivity may prove to be valuable to the study, or contrastingly distort what is happening. He explained that instead of repressing beliefs, perceptions, and values, researchers should, instead, account for them. Thus, I strived to understand what was actually happening by engaging in systematic reflection. To help bring greater awareness of my conceptualizations, beliefs, and motives, I engaged in impromptu memo writing to document my thoughts and feelings, my impressions of their responses, and my own level of engagement in dated field notes that were used throughout all interviews. I also engaged in systematic memo writing to encourage reflection and bring to surface reactions that I may not have been fully aware of. At minimum, after each interview, I wrote a brief, one-page field memo to record general impressions and insights. All field memos were dated and retained so that I had a systematic account of my subjectivity and the evolution of my analysis.

Data Protection, Storage, and Organization

I took extensive effort to ensure data could not be tied to participants. I stored informed consent forms in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I also asked participants to select pseudonyms at the beginning of the first interview to be used on all data collection documents including the demographics questionnaire, interview guide, field notes, and researcher memos. Each document was dated and labeled by participant pseudonym and type of data (e.g., 160824 sally interview 1 memo).

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. I stated their pseudonym at the beginning of each interview recording and did not say their names aloud in any of the recordings. After completing transcriptions, I destroyed interview recordings. I also maintained contact information sheets and the pseudonym key electronically in files separate from the research data. All files were encrypted, password-protected, and stored on my personal password-protected computer. Back-up copies were stored electronically on a secure, password-protected, UWM server.

All electronic data followed an organized labeling system using the numeric date (year, month, date), participants' pseudonym, and the type of data (e.g., 160812 sally interview 1). I stored recordings in an electronic folder labeled *recordings* until they were transcribed, saved, and backed up. I saved them in a case subfolder labeled by the participants' pseudonym within a storage folder labeled *raw data*. I stored raw transcripts and demographics questionnaires in the case subfolders. Once a transcript has been coded, I moved them to a separate series of case subfolders within a folder labeled *working data*, with subfolders labeled by pseudonym. I used the working data subfolders to store coded transcripts, copies of demographics and screening forms, research memos, and any other document for analysis. This organization allowed me to

keep original transcripts safeguarded from ones that have been coded so that I could return to originals throughout the data analysis and writing process. The working data folder also contained a *data analysis* subfolder, where I stored the code key, charts, code matrices, and drafts.

Data Analysis

I completed transcriptions in the order they were conducted after each round of interviews. Once all in-person interviews were completed, I began coding. Throughout the coding process, I had to be mindful of my own biases as statements could be perceived as either negative or positive. For examples, Nuñez et al. (2013) suggested that Latina students are restricted in their college options because of family responsibilities. However, students may not see their lives as restricted; rather, they may value staying connected to their families and attending college. What may seem like a restriction might actually be an act of agency guided by different values. Thus, I decided to apply codes that reflected participants' perceptions to minimize infusing my own bias into their experience. For example, Jane discussed that her high school teachers completed her financial aid application for her. It would have been impossible for me to objectively know if the teacher's action was positive or negative as I have no way to tell how her experience would have been different had the teacher not completed her financial aid application. Jane perhaps would have completed it on her own and gained skills to navigate financial aid during her first semester of college or she may have not completed it at all and never enrolled in college. Ultimately, since she expressed that this action was negative, I coded it as such.

After coding a few interview transcripts, I compare codes for common terminology and consistency. Although I coded and analyzed each case separately, I used the same list of codes

throughout all interviews, adding codes as needed. I grouped codes into categories using a process of code mapping that incorporated the conceptual framework and matched concepts that seemed to go together (Saldaña, 2016).

Furthermore, each transcript was comprised of four columns including numbered lines, transcripts, codes, and memos to record initial impressions. As suggested by Saldaña (2016), research memo notes were separate from my field notes and contained thoughts, patterns, frustrations, questions, and anything else that could lead to significant insights. Each memo was written alongside the transcript and code to which it pertained.

First Cycle Coding

Maxwell (2012) has suggested analyzing each case holistically before engaging in systematic cross-case analysis. Stake (2006) also asserted that the purpose of using a multiple case study design is to study a phenomenon while retaining the diversity of each case. As such, I coded all three interviews for each participant at a time so I could have a seamless understanding of each student's transition experience. Furthermore, I analyzed each case holistically, including all interviews, before engaging in cross-case analysis.

The first cycle of coding was based on my conceptual framework. Miles et al. (2016) described that a preliminary list of deductive codes could be developed from the research questions or conceptual framework. Thus, I identified aspects of the precollege environment, university environment, success, and Schlossberg's support, self, situation, and strategy (Goodman et al., 2006). Additionally, codes and sub-codes were developed inductively. Upon completion of the series of interviews for each participant, I wrote a research memo that summarized their transition and then I described their experience in response to my research questions.

Second Cycle Coding

Saldaña (2016) stated that the goal of the second cycle coding is to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization" (p. 234). I conducted a second cycle of coding—pattern coding—during cross-case analysis. The process of using pattern coding helped me group numerous codes into common patterns. For example, participants offered many different descriptions and perceptions of their courses. However, I had so many codes that I could not identify any meaningful relationships. However, as I grouped all course related codes by large or small classes, clear patterns emerged. Saldaña shared that pattern coding is effective for "condensing large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units" and for "laying the groundwork for cross-case analysis" (p. 236). Thus, I engaged in pattern coding to reorganize or converge codes into more meaningful categories. Patton (2015) described that data and classification systems must be reviewed and reworked so that the classification system is meaningful to the study.

Cross-case analysis helped me shed meaning on the phenomena. I used an Excel to create a matrix to compare codes for all participants. Participants were labeled in columns, and codes were grouped by conceptual framework and labeled in rows. I entered quotes and transcript line numbers in cells that intersected participant (column) and code (row) combinations. I sought to identify patterns among all participants as well as patterns that related to outcomes. Though I describe this phase as one cycle of coding, I examined the codes and transcripts multiple times as I discovered new patterns. During this phase, I also created a concept map for each participant to have a visual representation of how different aspects of their transition experiences led to different outcomes for each participant.

Review of Codes

Finally, after I identified patterns among participants, I cross-checked codes to ensure that I identified all codes within each concept and I double-checked for negative cases. I also wrote analytic memos to describe the patterns I discovered and considered alternatives to help ensure that my findings were meaningful. The matrix did not allow me to see the context of the participants' experiences or perspectives. Furthermore, Miles et al. (2016) stated that matrices can "force the data into shapes that are superficially comparable across cases, but you may actually be comparing intrinsically different things on dimensions that turn out to be trivial" (pp. 102-103). For example, though a participant may have discussed a topic at length, they may have been responding to a specific prompt and the issue may not have been perceived as central to their experience. Thus, I also reread transcripts for each participant to make sure that I understood the essence of their experience as I made sense of my findings.

Validity

Patton (2002) stated that "One barrier to credible qualitative findings stems from the suspicion that the analyst has shaped findings according to predispositions and biases" (p. 553). Furthermore, he described that engaging in and describing a systematic analysis can help build credibility. Thus, I engaged in systematic analysis to ensure my findings are credible. I also improved credibility of my findings by looking for data that contrasts with identified patterns and themes. Patton (2015) offered that by reporting negative cases, a researcher is engaging in intellectual integrity.

Although my findings should not be generalized beyond my dataset as they are not representative, they can help inform theories related to capital wealth and students' transition experiences. Yin (2015) has described that case studies allow for analytic generalization and that cases are "an opportunity to shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or

principles…" (p. 40). To strengthen such generalizations, my analysis will also include comparing my findings to the larger body of first-year student literature. Maxwell (2012) suggested presenting counter theories to test data to increase validity.

A limitation to my study is that I was limited to perspectives of the participants. Maxwell (2012) stated that interviews inherently do not have strong internal generalizability because interviews are social situations that depend on the questions asked and the research relationship to draw inferences about an action outside of the interview. Maxwell suggested that there is no way to fully account for the situation outside of the interview; thus, researchers must be careful about the inferences that they make. I anticipated that participants may have perceived aspects of their experiences to be insignificant though I found them to be important. With a critical realist perspective, Maxwell offered that participants' perspectives are real and must be accounted for; however, they do not have to be central to the understanding of reality in the study. Therefore, I included my interpretations and how participant describes the phenomena.

Additionally, participants knew the purpose of my study up front. Thus, my study presents self-selection bias as the topic of my study may have drawn some students to participate and others to opt out. Furthermore, participants may have opinions about my topic that may shape how they respond to my questions. They may downplay some aspects of their lives or magnify others. Although their statements were real, the statements may not have really reflected participants' thoughts; furthermore, they may not have reflected what was actually happening. I tried to minimize this limitation with a rigorous research design that included repeated questions and questions asked in different ways. Still, my study will always contain multiple layers of subjectivity. Despite this, there was still a wealth of information that can be

gleaned about the working-class female students' overall transition experiences to address the real phenomena that working-class students do not have equitable experiences in college, as measured by first-year to second-year retention rates and graduation rates.

CHAPTER IV: CONTEXT AND CASE DESCRIPTIONS

In this chapter, I describe my observations from 36 face-to-face interviews and 11 telephone interviews regarding the college transition experiences of 12 working-class women from different races and ethnicities during the fall of 2016. I begin by describing the context of their experiences which includes the university environment, the city, and the national context. Then, I describe each of my 12 participants' backgrounds and transition experiences. Finally, I offer a summary of the participants' experiences.

Context

In this section, I describe the context of the participants' first semesters at Large Urban University. My descriptions are based on participants' accounts and information I obtained from the institution's website. Participants spoke at length about the university, the surrounding city, and national events. As I designed my study, I did not consider how national events in the United States might influence participants' experiences. Thus, I also include a section that describes the national context in the United States in 2016.

The University Environment

Large Urban University [LUU] is centrally located in the heart of a large city. It is close to public transportation and is in walking distance to many attractions and events within the city. The university offers students a variety of majors to pursue and is well resourced with a medical college and other health and STEM schools and colleges.

The university has a robust array of resources to make new students feel welcome and transition successfully to college. During the summer prior to enrollment, students could participate in free summer bridge courses to help them place in higher level courses or prepare for fall semester courses. Furthermore, all students participated in a two-day orientation program

that required them to sleep overnight in the residence halls. Additionally, academic support offices held institutes, workshops, and gatherings over the summer to help students prepare for college. Though LUU did not have a football team or vibrant athletic culture, the campus hosted many annual events. Early in the semester students were invited to a student involvement fair, on-campus job fair, concert, and other activities to help them get connected and make friends. Additionally, students were highly encouraged to enroll in a one-credit, eight-week, first-year seminar to explore a topic of interest. Students also received free public transportation passes.

The university has a newly remodeled student center to serve as the hub for students on campus. It includes a large commuter center designed to support the 85% of students who commute to LUU. Maria explained, "The commuters still have resources. They have the commuter center, where commuters can chill out, warm up their food, or take showers, or lockers." The campus also had a wide array of academic and social organizations that students could join. LUU also offers students a wide variety of housing options; however, most students do not live on campus. The university is also unique as all student services offices were centrally located in one building.

Since my study focused on working-class students, I also looked at costs associated with enrollment. Tuition and fees totaled an estimated $7,000 per semester for students who lived at home. The most affordable option to live in a residence hall costed $5,500 per semester. Thus, students who lived on campus were charged $12,500 per semester.

Students also may have had access to financial resources to help reduce costs. First-year students were eligible for up to $2,250 in loans each semester. Students who had the highest need (lowest estimated family contribution) may have also been eligible for up to $3,000 in Federal Pell grants per semester. Pell grant awards were determined by a standard formula set

by the U.S. Department of Education usually based on institutional costs and parents' taxes forms. These figures show that the maximum amount of federal financial aid is $5,250 per semester which does not quite cover the full cost of tuition, much less housing, books, or other living expenses.

Of note, LUU offered a prestigious merit-based scholarship for underrepresented and working-class students who attended high schools in underserved districts. Students who were granted this scholarship were awarded $2,500 each semester. This institution also offered other merit and need-based scholarships and grants including a housing grant and a STEM grant for women. Participants' financial aid packages ranged from covering the entire cost of tuition, fees, room, and board with grants and scholarships, to a $1000 scholarship and federal loans. One student, who lived with her parents, owed $3,000 per semester after accounting for scholarships and loans. At least two participants also received private scholarships unaffiliated with the university.

The City

LUU is centered within a city of great wealth and poverty. I learned from participants that the city was comprised of many neighborhoods, all which have their own distinct characteristics. Many communities were known for their wealth, ethnic histories, or ethnic backgrounds of current residents. The city also had a vast public transportation system with buses and commuter trains. However, traffic was congested with some students commuting up to two hours each way to college.

The public school system included different types of high schools including selective enrollment schools, career-focused magnet schools, community/neighborhood schools, and charter schools. Additionally, the community had very wealthy private high schools. The city

had a large philanthropic base with programs designed to help high school students have mentoring and internship opportunities. However, many students were not connected to these opportunities. Students who participated in such programs usually sought them on their own or were sometimes connected to them via their high schools.

The National Context

All students transitioned to this university during the fall semester of 2016. Thus, their transitions took place during a contentious presidential election between candidates Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump. During this period, hate incidents were on the rise. Issues related to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and gender were at the forefront of news media and social media. This election marked a shift in the country where working-class Whites seemed fed up with the traditional political parties. Some Democrats and Independents were drawn to the Democratic primary candidate, Bernie Sanders, who was outspoken about income inequality and championed progressive policies such as increasing minimum wage, improving access to healthcare, and having greater regulations on financial industries. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton steadily conveyed messages supporting many marginalized and underrepresented groups, but also spoke of collaboration and expertise. She won a long contested primary and was expected to win the presidential election.

The Republican primaries started out with many candidates with Donald Trump eventually winning the nomination. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by 3 million people but lost the Electoral College to Donald Trump. Initially, few people took Donald Trump's candidacy seriously but he harnessed people's angers and frustrations. He argued that immigrants were taking jobs and Muslims posed a threat to the United States. The news media released video of him making misogynistic remarks toward women. He promised to build a wall

to keep immigrants out of the United States, bring back jobs for the working-class, and employ more nationalist foreign policies. He spoke his mind with little regard for who he might offend or insult. During and after the elections, hate crimes increased across the country and there was a resurgence in groups that held extreme beliefs (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017).

Increases in hateful rhetoric, religious intolerance, and anti-immigration sentiments had many marginalized groups concerned about their safety and future in the United States. Furthermore, people seemed to have more polarized views. After the election, countless stories were told of families not being able to talk to each other because they could not see any commonalities. It is within this context, that the 12 working-class female students began their journey to college.

Case Overview

This study included a total of 12 female participants who were all 18 years old and graduated high school in the spring of 2016. Three participants were Black, two were White, and seven were Latina. All participants were first-generation college students. Table 4 includes additional information about their backgrounds including their Hollingshead Score, which was used to screen whether they were working-class. Each score represents the education level and job status of the people who raised each participant. Additionally, I included data about the neighborhoods where participants grew up, including the social class, race or ethnic composition of neighbors, and whether the community was urban or rural. All participants grew up in the same city where LUU is located except Layla, who grew up in a small rural community within the state, but spent summers with her dad in the city. She also lived in the city with her dad for a year. Furthermore, I include data about participants' high schools including the race or ethnic composition of the student body and the type of school. Finally, I share their ACT scores and

high school grade point averages. Together, this data presents a snapshot about their social class, experiences in diverse cultures, and academic preparation.

Table 4

Participants' Characteristics & Precollege Environments

	Hollingshead score	Neighborhood(s)	High school	ACT score	GPA
Latina					
Oneyda	22	Working-class, Latina/o, urban	Latina/o public	21-24	3.5+
Nancy	8	Working-class, Latina/o, urban	White private Catholic	25+	3.5+
Mia	22	Working-class, Latina/o, urban	Latina/o public	17-20	3.5+
Maria	19	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, urban	Diverse selective public	25+	3-3.49
Christina	16	Working-class, Latina/o, urban	Latina/o public	25+	3.5+
Madison	33	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, urban	White, female, private Catholic	25+	3.5+
Anais	36	Working-class, Latina/o, urban	Diverse selective public	25+	3-3.49
Black					
Jane	24	Working-class, Black, urban	Black charter	17-20	3-3.49
Sky	22	Working-class, Black & Latina/o, urban Middle-class, White, urban	Diverse & immigrant, non-profit boarding	25+	3.5+
Demi	17	Working-class, Black & Latina/o, urban	Diverse selective public	21-24	3.5+
White					
Caroline	22	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, urban	Diverse selective public	25+	3.5+
Layla	34	Working-class, White, rural Working-class, Black & Latina/o, urban	White public	25+	3.5+

Furthermore, Table 5 serves as an overview of key aspects of the participants' transition experiences. I include the major the working-class women selected or were leaning toward at the beginning of the academic year. Their intended major often determined the types of classes they enrolled in during their first semester. I also include four factors that, together, offer insights regarding how they spent their time. This includes where they lived, the length of their commute if they lived at home, how many hours they worked if they had a job, and if they were involved in student organizations. A few students participated in student organizations early in the semester but ended their involvement prior to the end of the semester. I labeled those as "part year." Finally, I include data that offers a snapshot of their financial status including whether they earned a prestigious $2,500 merit-based diversity scholarship, which required students to participate in activities throughout the semester, and whether they took out loans. Some students

received other scholarships from LUU or other organizations, or state-funded financial aid. I did not include this data because participants did not consistently describe these resources to allow me to draw comparisons. Instead, I included information about their financial status after they were awarded financial aid. Some students owed money, some were refunded money, and others neither owed or were refunded. This table is organized by race and ethnicity to reflect my original research premise. Table 9 includes similar data sorted by student success.

Table 9

Key Aspects of Transition Experiences

	Major	**Living environment**	**Commute** (PT = public transportation)	**Job**	**Student orgs.**	**Prestigious scholarship**	**Loans**	**Tuition owed/ refund**
Latina								
Oneyda	Computer Science	Family	20 min. Car	20 hrs.	Part year		X	$2,000 Owed
Nancy	Nursing	Family	45 min. PT	20-40 hrs.[4]	Part year		X	Refund
Mia	Pre-Med	Family	45 min. PT			X	X	$2,000 Refund
Maria	Music	Family	1 hr. PT	7-22 hrs.[4]			X	$500 Owed
Christina	Mech. Eng.	Family	1 hr. PT		X	X		Neither
Madison	Sociology	Family	1 hr. PT	15 hrs.[3]	Part year	X		$400 Owed
Anais	Sociology	On campus			X	X	X	Refund (unknown amount)
Black								
Jane	Psychology	On campus			Part year		X[1]	$1,000 Refund[1]
Sky	Marketing	On campus		4-20 hrs.[2]	X	X		Neither
Demi	Nursing	Family	2 hrs.	12 hrs.				$450 Refund
White								
Caroline	Biology	Family	20 min. Car	40 hrs.	X		X	$3,000 Owed
Layla	Political Science	On campus		25 hrs.	X		X	$2,100 Owed

1. Loans did not disburse
2. 1st job: 4 hrs./wk., 2nd job: 4 hrs./wk., 3rd job: 20 hrs./wk.
3. Seasonal job for 1 month
4. Steady hours all semester plus seasonal job for one month

Case Descriptions

In this section, I described the participants' transition experiences. Stake (2006) asserted that in a multiple case study design, efforts should be taken to retain the diversity of each case (p. 39). Thus, I describe each participant's transition experience separately. I begin by describing each student's precollege environment. Then I explore why they chose to attend LUU, I follow

with descriptions of key aspects of their transition experiences. Within each Transition Experience section, I describe key aspects of each of the 4 S's—situation, self, strategy, and support. Though these concepts are interrelated and overlapping, I separate them to clarify major aspects of each students' transition. Finally, I use their definitions of success to describe whether they met their goals. After I describe each case, I provide a summary of key aspects of their transitions.

Jane

Jane is a Black female working-class student. She described herself as shy when she first met people, but with time she would become outgoing, social, and loyal. When she was a child, she had a traumatic experience that had contributed to her social anxiety, which she had worked to overcome for years. For example, in the summer prior to starting college, she bravely sang a solo in front of hundreds of people.

Precollege environment. Jane grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood in the city where she attended college. She was raised by her mom and stepdad, who married when she was a toddler, and had a younger sister. Her mom had an associate's degree and worked as a teacher's aide for a large child care organization. Her stepdad was the head of a maintenance team at a hospital. Jane also maintained a relationship with her biological father but did not rely on him. She described him as selfish and unreliable. Jane also had a large extended family that was close and celebratory. Her aunt and uncle earned bachelor's degrees and were executives at a large national company. She also had and a cousin who attended college. Jane attended a predominantly Black public charter school that she described as strict, with lots of homework, and rampant with favoritism, cliques, and bullying. Some of her teachers acted as parents, hosting events at their homes and giving rides home to students.

College selection and expectations. Jane's hoped to pursue a career in the U.S. Airforce. However, due to a medical condition, she could not enlist. Instead, motivated by her own experiences of childhood trauma, she decided to pursue college to be a child psychologist. As a requirement of her high school, she applied to many colleges. Ideally, she hoped to attend an historically Black women's university near her boyfriend. Ultimately chose LUU because it offered her the best financial aid package. Initially Jane was scared that she would not like college but she tried to quell her fears. She looked forward to getting involved and making new friends.

Transition experience. Jane's transition experience involved many setbacks. She managed them through hard work and determination.

University environment. Jane explained that she initially was shocked that there were so few Black students at the university. She also was surprised that everyone seemed to group themselves by race, ethnicity, or precollege friends. She desired to make new friends who were different from her as well as friends who were Black and had similar experiences to her. Furthermore, she perceived the campus to be too large and overwhelming to make meaningful connections. She felt as though interactions were impersonal and she was just a number.

Situation. Jane lived on campus and was initially awarded enough scholarships and financial aid that she expected to get a $1,000 refund to cover her living expenses. Because her financial aid did not disburse, she could not afford the $100 online access code for math.

Self. Although Jane attended a college preparatory charter high school, she did not have much knowledge about college. For example, Jane did not realize that tuition did not cover the costs of books, student fees, or other course materials. Furthermore, she did not read her syllabus and panicked toward the end of the semester when she learned that she had to complete

a long essay. She also did not see the value in participating in precollege opportunities. She explained, “I hadn’t taken any because that is what [my high school] classes were, pretty much college preparatory.” Yet, she tested into the lowest level math class. She did not draw the connection that precollege classes could have helped her place into a higher math class.

Jane also did not know how to navigate the institution. Early in the semester, Jane emailed her professors with questions about financial aid. She did not understand the specialized roles of faculty and staff and the decentralized structure of college. Eventually she realized “Help is not going to come to me,” and she visited the financial aid office. She was used to more support in her high school, where her teachers took her tax forms and completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on her behalf. Unfortunately, when I met with Jane the week before final exams, she still could not access her mother’s tax transcripts for her financial aid to disburse.

Support. Within the first few weeks of school, she ran into a few peers from high school and hung out with them between classes. They all ended up in the same classes because they all attended the last orientation and did not have many classes to choose from. Still, by the fifth week of classes, she did not make any new friends. She also expressed having more trouble making friends with women than men because men were more likely to spark up a conversation. She explained that she preferred to wait for people to first talk to her when making friends. However, she was not around enough people for this strategy to work. She did not have a roommate, could not find a job, and started to withdraw to her room by the fifth week of the semester.

She also went home on weekends and missed activities with other students on her floor. Thus, early in the semester, she spent most of her time alone in her room after classes. Toward

the middle of the semester, a staff member knocked on her door to talk to her about her responses to a survey where she disclosed she was isolated in her room. After this meeting she explained, “I realized how much of a crab I was, just staying in my room, so I started going to the little events like the pizza party. I started branching out some so I have more, I talked to more people now that I did before.”

Strategy. Jane was uncomfortable reaching out for support as she did not think anyone cared. In high school, she was used to teachers checking in with her. Still, she reached out to a professor and the financial aid office about her financial aid award and her teaching assistant (TA) about her access-code. When they were not helpful, she spent hours in her room teaching herself the math material and did not earn any points for the online homework. Despite challenges, Jane was driven. She was determined to do well despite not having the materials.

She also shared that she did not rely on her relatives who attended to college. She explained, “The only person who really knows anything about it is my mom. I don't talk to people. When I come back home, or over Thanksgiving break, everybody asked me how it's going. I just say good.”

Success. Though Jane performed well on her math exams, she earned a C. Besides this course, she did not find her classes too difficult. She did not mention learning new knowledge in her courses, feeling more confident, or making new friends. Although toward the end of the semester she started to branch out; overall, she did not feel like she belonged. Unfortunately, I could not get in touch with her for the last phone interview. I suspect that she did not attend LUU during the spring semester. On her Facebook account, she stated that she was talking to a military recruiter. The U.S. military changed the preexisting conditions exceptions in January 2017.

Nancy

Nancy is a Latina working-class student who described herself as outgoing and eager to meet people, be involved, and learn. Nancy was determined to become a nurse practitioner.

Precollege environment. Nancy's parents were both born in Mexico. She had three older sisters who each had careers as teachers and were much older than her. When Nancy was younger, her parents did well financially and bought a house and an apartment. Then her dad struggled with alcoholism and gambling and her parents divorced when she was in fourth grade. Nancy lived in a predominantly Mexican immigrant neighborhood with her mom and her next older sister, who was nine years older and helped raise Nancy. Nancy's sister worked and paid bills while she attended college. Her mom had arthritis and was unable to work so she babysat for cash. Although her mother did not have a lot of money, she supported Nancy's learning. For example, she insisted that Nancy take music lessons. Nancy also earned scholarships to attend a predominantly White, private Catholic, middle/upper-class high school. Her closest friends were White and she looked up to their parents as mentors to help her navigate her educational and career path.

College selection and expectations. Nancy had her heart set on attending a private university that would directly admit her into a nursing program; however, financial aid packages were not substantial enough. Ultimately she decided to attend LUU because it was more affordable and she could live at home. Nancy was awarded enough grants and scholarships to receive a financial aid excess check, which she put away for summer school and emergencies. She also was excited to be directly admitted to both the honors college and the nursing program. Nancy also expressed confidence that she would make friends easily but she still wished she attended a school where she could live on campus. She was nervous that she was not smart

enough to do well in college.

Transition experience. Nancy's transition involved many social setbacks and academic challenges. She managed them by studying and seeking support from her sisters, friends.

University environment. Nancy also faced challenges related to the campus climate. Prior to the start of the semester, she looked forward to attending a diverse university because she hoped to develop friendships with people from different backgrounds. However, within a few weeks, her excitement diminished as she struggled to make friends and she observed students hanging in groups segregated by race and ethnicity. Nancy also was not comfortable hanging out in Latina/o student organizations. She explained,

> I'd been used to only talking to Caucasian people or being with Caucasian people so sometimes I'll be with Hispanic people and there are some things that I'm just taking up. I'm Mexican and I understand the Mexican culture but there is some lingo or some of that, I just am not getting it. I'm not getting it.

She was used to being the only Mexican in her friend group and preferred friends from cultures different from hers.

Situation. Initially, Nancy was excited about college because she would have more independence. However, throughout the semester her mom became stricter and required Nancy to be home by 7 p.m. To avoid being home, Nancy got a second seasonal evening job toward the end of the semester. She wished she could live on campus so that she did not have to abide by her mom's rules.

Self. Nancy also struggled to fit in with White students in college and fondly looked back to the ease of which she made friends in high school. However, her perceptions about how well she fit in with her friends may have been distorted. For example, on the day of the 2016

presidential election, she said,

> Kelly had messaged me that morning. She's like, "We won. Trump won." And then I messaged them, "I told my mom Trump won and she started crying," and she didn't message me the whole day and didn't know what to do [laughter].

She was hurt that her friends were not mindful about how the anti-immigration rhetoric affected her. Still, Nancy continued to value this friendship.

Support. Throughout the semester, Nancy struggled to make close friends. She was engaged with honors college activities and she talked to classmates and other honors students. Although she had a few social connections in college, she did not have the deep friendships and college experiences she initially envisioned.

She also compared her experience to the experiences of her high school friends who attended other universities and lived on campus. She wished she had a college experience similar to theirs. Yet, she shared that she did not want to live on campus at LUU. She reasoned that if she would take out loans to live on campus, she would also transfer to a school that she wanted to attend.

By the end of the semester, she also seemed to lose her closest friends from high school as they avoided her when they returned home during breaks. Nancy also broke up with her boyfriend because he mistreated her. She dated someone for a week during the semester but he broke up with her too. Both ex-boyfriends were from immigrant families. She explained,

> I've talked to this other guy and he was even the same cultural background and everything. Well he wasn't Mexican, but my other boyfriend was Ukrainian, and I started seeing this Polish guy, and I liked it because it was a similar background. His parents had the same upbringing as my ex's parents, so he understood. I just really liked

the culture and it was nice.

Nancy also largely relied on the advice of her older sister, who graduated from LUU. Her sister told her that she likely would not find her close friends until her junior year of college. This helped Nancy manage her expectations.

***Strategy*.** Nancy persistently addressed challenges that came her way. For example, early in the semester, she formed study groups with other students who were also directly admitted to the nursing program. She also worked on her statistics homework early in the week and diligently visited her professor during office. Ultimately she dropped the course. Furthermore, when her mom required her to be home by 7 p.m., she got another job so she could get out of the house in the evenings. She also pledged a sorority to find friends. Toward the end of the semester, she left the sorority because members partied too much and lacked academic focus. Thus, these examples show that Nancy tackled challenges head on.

Success. Overall, Nancy struggled during the first semester of college. She quit the sorority, broke up with her boyfriend, dropped a statistics class, and did not mention learning anything at college. After she got her fall semester grades for the semester, she considered transferring to another university and changing her major. Nancy also started out performing well in chemistry as she earned As on tests; however, her performance decreased throughout the semester as the material became less familiar from what she learned in high school. She earned a C chemistry and a 3.0 GPA for the semester, which put her on probation for the honors college and direct admission to nursing. To maintain her status, she needed to earn at least a 3.4 GPA. She felt like an outsider during her first semester of college. Yet, she perseveres and refused to allow anything to stop her from earning a degree.

Oneyda

Oneyda is a Latina working-class female student who described herself as outgoing and eager to get involved in activities to advance her career prospects. Oneyda knew that she wanted to work with computers.

Precollege environment. Oneyda grew up in a mostly Latina/o neighborhood. She lived with her parents and two older brothers. Her parents did not speak much English. Her father was a forklift driver and her mom had not worked in many years. Oneyda's oldest brother attempted college but stopped attending when he had a child.

Although Oneyda was born in the United States, the rest of her family was undocumented. Her older brother became naturalized during the fall 2016 semester. Shortly afterwards, her parents also applied to become legal permanent residents. Ever since Oneyda was a child, her family told her that she must take advantage of every opportunity since she had access to federal financial aid. Oneyda attended a community public high school comprised of mostly Latina/o students. The school also had philanthropic funding and was perceived as better than other community public schools. Additionally, while in high school, she was a part of a college-success program that helped support underrepresented high school seniors be successful. The program placed her in an internship with a recruiting firm and, during her first semester of college, provided mentoring and financial support. During her senior year in high school she dated a student who, early in the fall semester, returned to Mexico to attend school.

College selection and expectations. Oneyda chose to attend a local university because it was the most affordable and she could live at home. She wished she could have attended the state large flagship institution instead as she believed they had more activities in which she could get involved. Oneyda did not have high expectations about her experience at LUU. She also thought students who lived on campus had a better experience than students who lived off

campus. She expected her experience to be similar to high school.

Transition experience. Oneyda's attitude toward her transition experience was neither bad nor good. To her, it was like high school and she just wanted to get through it. She also encountered a few setbacks during the semester.

University environment. Oneyda did not pay too much attention to the university environment because she already had friends who also attended LUU. She also said she was used to the structure. She said,

> I had taken some college classes, in the community college back in high school and I sort of already had the mentality of how I should expect it. In the other college classes, you're basically on your own. It's not like in high school were everybody's helping each other out and everybody else knows each other.

Still, Oneyda hoped that she could live on campus or be a part of a campus with greater school spirit.

Situation. The expenses associated with college weighed heavily on Oneyda throughout the semester. After financial aid, owed about $2,000 each semester. To manage her finances, she applied for a job at the start of the semester. The college-success program forwarded her the job announcement. She started the job working in information technology (IT) at a public school in early October. She would finish her classes at noon daily and go straight to work. By the end of the semester, she earned a few good paychecks to reduce her stress.

Oneyda initially had trouble adjusting to the new academic environment. Oneyda was excited to have freedom to do homework without always having someone look over her but she quickly got behind in her courses and had to learn how to manage her time. She also struggled to learn math via slide show lectures. She would have preferred the professor to do problems on a

white board. Oneyda wanted more guidance but she also expected that she would have to learn things on her own when she came to college. Her experience taking a course at the community college during her senior year of high school helped her anticipate what to expect.

Self. Oneyda described herself as taking advantage of every opportunity presented to her. Yet, I did not see her spirit in any of the interviews. When reflecting on her college experience, she stated, "I feel like it's just a routine. It's just something I have to do." She hoped that her experience would improve once she gets into her major courses. During this semester, she took courses that did not spark her curiosity.

Support. Oneyda said that she was not interested in making friends because so many friends from high school also attended LUU. During the fifth week of classes, she regularly hung out with friends in the commuter lounge after her classes. However, when she started her job she stopped hanging out with friends and stopped attending the Bible study group that she joined in the beginning of the year.

Oneyda also did not rely on her family for emotional or academic support. Yet, she appreciated and supported her parents. She also had an aunt that she looked up to for inspiration because she came to the United States as an adult, learned English, attended college, and became a nurse.

Meanwhile, her brother was the cause of much stress as he was incarcerated in October. Her family gathered thousands of dollars to post bail. This happened around the time that her she final tuition payment was due. Her dad was expected to pay her tuition balance, but, because of her brother, he was short on cash. Ultimately, Oneyda turned to the college-success program to request a $500 emergency grant to pay her remaining tuition balance. The college-success program also assigned her a mentor, which led Oneyda to learning about a new major that

required fewer math classes.

Strategy. Oneyda also describes a brief period during the semester when she considered withdrawing from college. She was stressed out about her brother's incarceration and considered moving to Mexico to attend college closer to her boyfriend. During this time, she found out that her dad briefly attended college in Mexico. He also planned to be an engineer and he convinced her to complete college in the United States. Knowing that her dad tried college made her proud. By the end of the semester, she refocused her energy on herself and asked her parents not to give her any updates on her brother so that she could focus on school. She was determined to have a better life than her parents and was very focused on completing college.

During her first semester, she quickly became weary of her math class. She never found a successful approach to learn the material. She tried tutoring but was not satisfied with it. She also studied with a classmate on occasion but her classmate was not performing well either. She regretted taking a summer class, which placed her into a higher math class. She thought she would have done better staying in the lower math class.

Success. During the fifth week of classes, she shared that she did not feel as though she belonged. She shared the same sentiments at the end of the semester. Ultimately, she did not make friends, was not involved on campus, and failed her math course. In her other classes, she performed well academically. Overall, her experience was not bad. It was just work.

Caroline

Caroline is a White working-class female student who moved to the United States from Poland when she was three years old. Her goal was to work in the science and medical fields but she had not quite figure out what major to pursue. Prior to the start of the semester, she stated that she planned to complete a degree in biology. Afterwards she would attend a community

college to study radiology because people told her that she would not make money with a biology degree. By the end of the semester, she decided to pursue occupational therapy.

Precollege environment. Caroline also had a brother who was three years older than her and was partially blind. Caroline learned to be independent from a young age as her dad was on the road as a truck driver and her mom worked second shift as a janitor. Since first grade, Caroline was home alone with her brother during most evenings. She recalled that, in ninth grade, she was not eligible for free lunch so she either did not eat lunch or her friend would share her free lunch. Caroline attended public elementary and middle schools. Determined to go to college, she applied to a selective enrollment high school on her own. During high school, she took many AP classes, took Japanese, taught herself Korean, and was very involved in after school activities. Caroline's high school was diverse, yet predominantly White.

College selection and expectations. Caroline had her heart set on going to an out-of-state college or to the state flagship university. However, she ended up attending her last choice institution because it was the least expensive and local so she could live at home. Still, Caroline looked forward to making friends and being involved. She was confident in her academic abilities but she anticipated being very tired and stressed out. She was not quite sure how she would balance everything.

Transition experience. Caroline was very stressed out about finances during her first semester of college. Caroline struggled to navigate many competing priorities, interests, and responsibilities.

University environment. Early in the semester, Caroline was surprised to see that many students did not do homework, partied, and did not seem to care about academics. Beyond that, Caroline did not discuss the campus environment. She said she did not notice race, gender, or

social class issues.

Situation. In the beginning of the semester, Caroline expressed excitement about taking chemistry. During the semester, she grew overwhelmed by the amount of material in the class. She said that each lecture had over 50 slides and she had trouble figured out what to study for.

Throughout the first semester, Caroline was worried about money. She was not eligible for Pell grants but she did get a small scholarship and took out student loans. Still, her mom paid $3,000 of her tuition balance by credit card. Caroline also purchased a car before starting college and had to pay her loan and all associated costs. Thus, she worked about 40 hours a week. She worked on weekends at a small family-owned bakery. Additionally, in the beginning of the semester, she started a second job at a retailer in a strip mall. By the fifth week of classes, she hated it and was burned out; yet, she refused to quit. Eventually, the owners of the bakery offered her a raise to $11 per hour and full-time employment if she quit her other job. Caroline quit her retail job but continued to pick up hours on occasion.

Self. Caroline was responsible as demonstrated by her commitment to working, saving money, paying off loans, and doing things independently. Throughout her interviews, Caroline expressed discomfort about her appearance, eating alone, and asking others for help.

Support. Caroline described her parents as caring; yet, she did not think they understood her experience. They did not attend college and her mom did not speak much English. Ultimately, Caroline did not seek support of anyone including her boyfriend.

Caroline joined an Asian student organization. She expressed initially being nervous about how others perceived her because she was the only White person in the club. Though, she did not let her nervousness stop her and she became very involved. She also knew a few who were also in the Asian cultural club at her high school. By the end of the semester, she felt more

comfortable. However, she was uninterested in talking about issues related to race or ethnicity. For example, she stated,

> I don't think those kinds of things affect the way I live my life because, even though I'm White, I'm still in an Asian student organization and I don't know, I don't really see skin tone. Everyone's the same to me.

Caroline missed her friends from high school and continued to communicate with them throughout the semester via group chats. She also attended LUU with her best friend. However, they had different schedules and hardly saw each other. Most of her friends attended large flagship universities. During the fifth week of the semester, she expressed envy that they were getting the college experience that she had hoped for. They were involved in many campus activities and their schools had spirit. She also nearly broke up with her boyfriend because she was stressed out, sad, and could not find the time to talk to him. By the end of the semester, she reconnected with him, saw her friends, and planned to see them over winter break. Ultimately, her expectations about her college experience, as well as stress, strained her relationships.

Despite Caroline's frustrations with her overall college experience, she did make a few new friends. She became good friends with a student who shared three classes with her. She also developed closer relationships to people she met in the Asian student organization.

Strategy. Caroline successfully managed several competing responsibilities during her first semester. However, a few challenges overwhelmed her. Early in the semester, Caroline shared that she skipped meals because she did not have time to prepare them, she thought the food on campus was too unhealthy and expensive, and she did not like to eat alone. She regularly would not eat until nine or ten o'clock at night, after she got home from work. One of her classmates even brought her food from the dining hall to snack on because she was hungry so

often. By the end of the semester, she would occasionally eat lunch on campus with him, but she said she had lost weight because she was not eating regularly. She also experienced increasing headaches.

Toward the end of the semester, Caroline shared that she made enough money to pay down her student loans. Meanwhile, she lamented that she did not have enough money to buy her friends Christmas presents. She made a savvy financial decision when she changed her major from biology to undeclared so that she did not have to pay $1,000 toward differential tuition that was associated with specific majors.

Success. Caroline earned good grades in her courses; however, she never mentioned learning. Instead, she was focused on her grades and selecting a major. Ultimately, she thought she found a major that she would like and would pay well. Though she was not satisfied with her college experience in comparison with her friends' experiences, she said that she felt like she belonged at LUU. She also made a few friends by the end of the semester.

Sky

Sky is a Black working-class female student whose parents were from Nigeria. Throughout her interviews she was confident, insightful, and relaxed. She expressed that she could easily relate to people from different backgrounds and interests. Sky explained that she pursued a degree in marketing because she wanted to be creative without the pressure associated with being a leader.

Precollege environment. Sky's parents were from wealthy African families who moved to the United States in search of more opportunities. She described her family as loving yet strict. They valued obedience, servitude, and respect for elders. When she was younger, her dad had a successful career in real estate, which led her family to progressively move to wealthier

neighborhoods until the economy crashed in 2007. Since then, her family had faced hardships. Her dad went to Africa in search of work but, after he left, learned that he could not return to the United States for ten years. In seventh grade, Sky, along with her older sister, moved to a boarding school for children who faced severe hardships. At the boarding school, she developed many supportive authentic friendships. Most of her friends also went to college, but at different institutions.

College selection and expectations. When I asked Sky about when she decided to go to college, she shared, "It was always something that I planned on doing because I always knew that I wanted to make a better life for myself as well as for my family." Initially, she hoped to attend an out-of-state school, but she attended a local university because it offered her the best financial aid package and was closest to her family. When I asked her about her expectations about college she stated, "My only concern is that I won't be able to manage my time when it comes to homework and stuff. I think that's my only concern. I'm not really concerned about making any more friends."

Transition experience. Sky's transition experience involved challenges with finances, time management, and peer relationships. As she slowly resolved or managed these challenges, her college experience improved.

University environment. Sky expressed that LUU was open, inviting, and diverse. She was comforted by faculty members who spoke their opinions in her courses. Yet, she also struggled with independence. Throughout her interviews, she mentioned the campus had many resources, but she often emphasized that you must ask for help. Sky was used to an environment where people asked her if she needed help. She also did not initially seek support from faculty, staff, or academic support units. During her final interview, she expressed that she knew she

should reach out to them, but she did not. She only reached to her English professor for help on her research paper.

In her interview during the fifth week of classes, she was frustrated when she overheard other students discussing being fearful about being in poor neighborhoods. Furthermore, the 2016 presidential election deeply affected her. She struggled with extreme views of hate on social media.

Situation. Throughout the semester Sky was stressed out about finances. During the first few weeks, she applied for on-campus jobs but did not get them despite having a work-study allocation through financial aid. With only five dollars, she had to borrow money from her sister to pay her phone bill. When I asked her about loans, she stated,

> My only big issue is not having money during the year and for my own personal expenses. And I don't see the point in taking out a loan for that. I'd rather just figure out another way than worry about having to pay money back.

Although she recognized she did not have money, she did not see this as a significant challenge.

She received grants and scholarships to cover the entire cost of tuition, room, and board but she did not get a refund for living expenses. Sky lived in the residence halls. She attended residence hall activities within the building because they served food, but she did not participate in other activities in her community, such as going downtown or going out to eat, because she did not have money.

Self. Prior to the start of the semester, she expressed confidence that she would be successful in college. By the fifth week, her mood shifted as she expressed being tired all the time, never feeling relaxed, gaining weight, and feeling self-conscious. By the end of the semester, however, she was much more positive about her college experience.

Support. In the beginning of the semester, Sky joined an African student organization and attended residence hall activities. However, her attendance waned as her financial challenges and stress increased. She expressed, "I'm not really focused on making these huge memories because right now I am trying to get comfortable for the most part with the workload on top of figuring out my financial issues."

Sky did not become friends with her roommate, who she described as sensitive and talkative, but she did become friends with another student in her cluster who had similar struggles with money. Yet, it was not until the end of the semester, when she found her friend group, that she felt comfortable at LUU. They had similar backgrounds to her as they were from working-class families. One friend was Latina and the other friend was African. They became friends through studying for their math class. By the end of the semester, she studied, worked out, and ate meals with this group of friends.

Although Sky had a close and supportive family, she did not rely on them during her first semester. Rather, she distanced herself from them as they were a source of stress. She was much more comfortable relying on friends for support.

Strategy. Early in the semester, Sky was overwhelmed by homework for math and macroeconomics and was nervous about her research paper for English. She said that she procrastinated and was having trouble adjusting to the pace of the courses. Yet, she also watched a lot of Netflix, fell asleep during the day, and had trouble focusing. Overall, she had difficulty adjusting to fewer deadlines and higher academic expectations. By the end of the semester, she figured out what her study needs were. She studied more for all her courses and formed a study group for math. Initially she prioritized academics and finances, her biggest stressors, over everything else.

She also strategized how to make due with no money. For example, she had a meal plan for five days a but had to buy food for the weekends. She considered bringing plastic containers into the dining hall to sneak food out. Throughout the semester she continued to seek employment. Her first job was as an usher for performances. For her second job, she was a promotor for a car share company. Finally, at the end of the semester, she found a job that would give her more hours and a consistent schedule.

Success. By the end of her first semester, Sky she said that she felt like she belonged at LUU. She also earned good grades and was committed to the institution. Sky did not talk about learning anything from her courses. Yet, she did learn a lot about racial issues in the United States through her discussions with her cluster-mate. Once she found made close friends and found more stable employment, she was satisfied with her experience.

Mia

Mia is a Latina working-class female student who was born in Mexico and came to the United States when she was three months old. With strong influence of her mother, Mia began college with the intention of being pre-med; however, she expressed uncertainty prior to the start of the semester.

Precollege environment. Mia grew up in a Latina/o neighborhood. She lived with her parents, older sister, and younger sister. Her dad worked for many years in a factory but health issues necessitated him to take a lower position. Mia's mom had trouble finding a job and took care of her nieces and nephews. Mia attended a predominantly Latina/o public high school and she was disappointed with the academic rigor. She attributed this to the benchmark grading system, which allowed students to repeatedly turn in assignments for better grades. Yet, Mia strongly advocated for herself. For example, in high school she confronted teachers who were

not performing their job duties and she was persistent about seeking assistance from her teachers and counselors to prepare for college. She also disclosed that she was bullied in middle school and engaged in cutting when she was in high school. Before the start of the semester, she was anxious about college.

College selection and expectations. During high school, Mia took initiative to take a college course, research colleges, and apply for scholarships. She hoped to attend an out-of-state university, but she decided to go to LUU because it was the most affordable four-year university option and she could live at home. Initially, she was excited to make friends and participate in activities, but she was nervous about her academic preparation.

Transition experience. At the beginning of the semester, Mia was anxious about making friends and doing well in her courses. By the end of the semester, she started to form friendships and she was more confident in her academic abilities.

University environment. Mia initially perceived that LUU was not representative of Latina/os. She said,

> You're not used to the different types of cultures. For example, here, I thought there was going to be a lot of Latinos but I really don't see many Latinos. There's a lot of, I don't want to just specify, but Arabs and White people. I mean they're really friendly and everything but that aspect has changed because I've always gone to a Latino community school.

However, by the end of the semester, she no longer though about the diversity of the campus. She said, "After a while, there would be certain situations where random people would come up and just ask. Even if they're from different ethnicities, they're really nice and we don't have a problem."

Situation. Mia struggled with the style of her professors. In high school, she was used to having closer and informal relationships with teachers. However, in college, when she reached out to her professors, they gave her brief answers and often had lines outside their doors. She also struggled with their teaching styles. She also explained, "He just literally hands out the worksheets and expects us to work on it and I'm just like… Uhhh. I think that's what's bringing my grade down." She found slideshow lectures difficult to learn from and felt that discussions were sometimes unrelated to the course requirements. Midway through the semester, she dropped her math class.

Self. Mia was also compassionate towards others' needs. For example, Mia's family had a shared laptop so she would let her sisters do their homework first and she would stay up late to finish hers. During a typical weekday, she would sleep three to four hours a night. During finals week, she slept one to two hours a night. Additionally, she often was in too much of a rush to prepare herself lunch. Mia describes crying many times early in the semester. However, once she dropped her math class, she only cried four or five times.

Support. By the fifth week, Mia expressed that she felt comfortable on campus, but she did not fit in socially. Although a few friends from high school also attended LUU, she did not have classes with them. As the semester went on, she realized that she shared classes with other students who were in her summer college courses and she formed study groups. They studied together multiple times a week and hung out socially as well. Mia also relied on her mother for emotional support. Mia's mom also made her food and checked up on her to make sure she arrived on campus when she did not get much sleep at night.

Mia initially was surprised by her behavior in college. During the fifth week of classes she said, "I just think it's a transition from being such an open person to being able to manage

everything and having a lot of support. It's just a big change." Overall, she struggled to seek assistance from people who seemed unapproachable. For example, she said, "…like the worksheets, I don't complete them. Some of these are very difficult for me to understand but I'm too shy to ask. I think that's changed also. I said I would ask for help, but I get too intimidated easily now." However, she is capable of being assertive. In high school, she took initiative to teach other students, navigate the college application process, and confront a teacher who did not teach. Additionally, in college, she persistently sought help from the financial aid office and sought feedback from her English teacher who was easier to approach. By the end of the semester, although she was not comfortable seeking support from everyone, she did identify more resources to support her.

Strategies. Mia navigated many challenges and barriers during her first semester. By the fifth week of classes, she tried many resources to help her academically. She visited the tutoring center but discovered that there were no tutors for pre-calculus. Initially, she did homework with a few friends the she made in her course but she found it difficult to form study groups. Instead, she often studied at home on her own. She also tried to seek help from her chemistry teaching assistant, but the TA was only available one day a week. By the end of the semester, she found a study group for Chemistry but she dropped her math class. Mia also decided that she would not major in pre-med because she did not want to take another math class. She thought she might major in psychology instead. She decided to enroll in few courses related to different majors in the spring semester to help her select a major.

Success. Though Mia dropped her math class and was still identifying a major, she felt positive about her experience by the end of the semester. When reflecting on her first semester she stated, "I feel I've strengthened. I feel a bit more confident about finishing college and

reaching my goals. I guess finding a way to manage my courses and finding out which ones are my weaknesses." Overall, Mia learned how to navigate college. She also identified resources to support her academic success and started forming friendships. By the end of the semester, she felt as though she belonged.

Maria

Maria is a Latina working-class female student. She expressed both passion and pragmatism when she made decisions. She played guitar and sang, and she was pursuing a degree in music. She also enjoyed science and initially considered pursuing a degree in biomedical sciences.

Precollege environment. Maria described her neighborhood as nice with Latina/o and Polish neighbors. She lived in the lower level of a duplex with relatives on the upper level. Her mom worked as a cashier and her father worked as a custodian. Both of Maria's parents moved to the United States in their early 20s. She spoke highly of her parents and described her childhood as typical. She also had an older brother, who also attended LUU, and a younger sister. Maria attended a selective enrollment high school where she was involved in many activities. During high school, she found courage to sing in front of audiences.

College selection and expectations. At the last minute, Maria decided to pursue a degree in music instead of biomedical sciences. LUU was the only place where she could audition to get into a music program; though, it was initially her last choice. She was conflicted with her decision because she dreamed of going away to school and living in a residence hall. Yet, Maria was excited to start college. She was confident in her academic abilities but nervous about how she compared to other performers. She also looked forward to gaining more independence and finding clarity about what degree to pursue. Finally, she hoped to make new

friends and gain more worldly knowledge.

Transition experience. Maria's transition experience involved great fulfillment in expanding her musical skills, but initial dissatisfaction with making new friends and feeling connected to the campus community. As the semester progressed, she grew closer to peers in her choir course. She attributed the number of practices and performances to helping her build relationships.

University environment. Maria perceived that LUU provided more social support to residence hall students and she was frustrated that most activities were too late in evening to participate. She hoped that there would have been more activities during the day to help her connect to other students. Furthermore, she was disappointed in the resources of the music program. For example, she had to wait until the 10th week of classes to be assigned a practice room.

Situation. Despite having grants and scholarships, Maria still had to take out $3,000 a year in subsidized loans as well as pay $500 toward tuition. However, she was not worried by the amount of loans because she thought her payments would be reasonable upon graduation. Maria also continued to work at her tutoring job that she had prior to college because it offered her flexible hours. By the fifth weeks of classes, she was surprised by how much money she spent on food. She explained that she did not always have time to make food, so she purchased it on campus. At the same time, she had more time than she anticipated. In October, she got a temporary second job at a Halloween store working 20 hours a week. Though she worked more hours, she also mentioned spending more money on insignificant things.

By the fifth week of classes, Maria felt like she established a routine. When reflecting on her college experience, she stated, "The easiest part of it is the academic portion just because, in

a way, it's not all that new. It's kind of what I was doing in high school."

Self. Maria did not reach out to her professors or rely on her parents for support during her first semester. She occasionally asked her brother to help her navigate aspects of college, such as financial aid, at LUU. For emotional support, she turned to friends from high school by using a group chat application on her phone. Maria was mostly independent and she did not have many friends from LUU. However, at the end of the semester, she confessed, "I think part of it was just me scared of meeting other people and I just tried to justify a reason for me not to go." Maria further explained that she never had to make friends before and she did not know how to do it.

Support. Although she felt settled into a routine by the fifth week of classes, Maria still struggled to make friends. She attended the involvement fair but she did not join any organizations. She reconnected with a few people she met during a precollege workshop and hung out with a close friend from high school. She also occasionally saw with friends who still lived in the area. However, she did not have the close relationships she thought she was going to have in college.

By the end of the semester, she started to form closer friendships. She shared, "I think as time passed, I think it got easier for me to establish a connection with everybody else, especially the girls in my women's choir, because we're a small class and we all get along pretty well." Although she was not sure that she would maintain these friendships and she still wanted to be more involved in activities, overall she was satisfied with her experience.

Strategy. In the beginning of the semester, Maria sought to pursue a degree in music composition. However, the university did not have that program so she considered others. Throughout the semester, she contemplated transferring so that she could major in music

composition. Yet, she was also conflicted because she did not want to have more debt. Furthermore, she wanted to pursue a career that would pay well and offer stability. By the fifth week of classes, she had already considered double majoring in marketing to ensure career stability. Toward the end of the semester, she also considered science and health fields. Above all, she sought financial stability and was uncertain that music would lead to this.

Success. Maria experienced musical success early during the semester stating, "I've definitely seen an improvement in my abilities. Seeing that improvement, it helps me know that I'm going in the right direction." Although she was disappointed that she did not have a core group of friends, she was satisfied with her experience overall. She believed that with a little more time, she would feel like she belonged. Overall, she focused on her academic goals and succeeded in them.

Demi

Demi is a Black working-class female college student who grew up in poverty. She was independent, outspoken, assertive, empathetic, and friendly. Her goal was to be a nurse and work in an urban community to help Black and Latina women with family planning and pregnancies.

Precollege environment. Demi had no connection to her biological father. Her mom and stepfather were together since she was a toddler. She lived with her mom, stepfather, younger sister, and nephew. She also had a brother who was seven years older than her, but he had been incarcerated since she was eight years old.

Throughout her childhood, she moved to many different neighborhoods because her family often was evicted. Once, her mom left her to live with friends. She described, "That's when my mom had moved to Wisconsin and she had left me and my sister here. She had left

us." Demi described a tumultuous relationship with her mother, who also had an unstable family environment growing up. She explained that her mom was bipolar, did not take medications, lied constantly, and smoked marijuana. No one in her household, besides Demi, worked. Her mom did collect Social Security for her disability.

Somehow, Demi has been successful academically despite these challenges. She saw education as her way out of poverty. She attended a nationally recognized selective enrollment high school. Yet, she felt like an outcast. She explained that her high school was diverse, but people looked down on her for her social class. She did, however, have a close relationship with her chemistry teacher who she remained close to in college.

College selection and expectations. Demi got accepted into every university she applied to and she hoped that she would have gotten enough funding to attend an out-of-state university. Ultimately, she chose LUU because it offered her the best financial aid package and allowed her to live at home and save money.

Transition. Though Demi perhaps had the most hectic schedule with the greatest amount of responsibility, she seemed calm and in control throughout the entire semester.

University environment. Demi was frustrated with the campus culture and lamented that other students were not social or focused on their education. She was annoyed that students had loud conversations during lectures, smoked in no-smoking areas, and lacked focus toward academics. Her campus job helped her connect to peers on campus; however, her coworkers openly discussed partying, drinking, and using drugs. She struggled to relate to them.

Situation. Demi's financial aid package was large enough to give her a $450 refund to use toward living expenses. She tried to save it but she needed to purchase books, a calculator, and an I-clicker. Later in the semester, she used it to buy food for sister's baby shower and for

necessities after her nephew was born. In the beginning of the semester, Demi found an on-campus job in the computing center. She worked 12 hours a week and used the income to pay her cell phone, cable, and internet bills. She also bought food on campus when she did not have food from home to bring. By the end of the semester, she spent almost all her savings.

Demi left her house at 7 a.m. and returned home around 9 p.m., commuting up to two hours each way, five days a week. Yet, she had established a good routine to get her homework done. She completed assignments between classes on weekends.

Self. Demi valued hard work and longed to be at a campus where she would meet more people who showed that they cared about their education as well. Meanwhile, her experiences in her courses were validating. She described that her classmates and professors found her perspective insightful. She had an acute awareness of systematic injustices and she spoke her mind. In contrast, in high school, her ideas were criticized or silenced. She was also independent as she could navigate the city, use public transportation, and budget her money.

Support. Early in the semester she struggled to make friends. When she tried to have conversations, people did not talk back. During the semester, she eventually made two friends. However, she ultimately stopped talking to them because they did not share her values. One friend asked Demi to help her cheat on an assignment and the other friend was a Trump supporter. She struggled to find friends with the same values, goals, and outlook on life.

Demi explained that her stress was never related to school; rather, it was related to her family. Her family argued with her, did not show her support, and relied on her to pay for necessities. Instead, Demi relied on her high school chemistry teacher for emotional support and for help with her college chemistry course. Early in the semester, she spoke to her chemistry teacher for at least an hour each week. She also visits her high school regularly to participate in

a peer counseling program that her chemistry teacher created to help empower and support racially and ethnically underrepresented students.

Strategy. Demi was savvy and strategic, managed college with very little money. She used an e-book to help her comprehend a difficult text, advocated for herself by going to the financial aid office, and brought up concerns about a lesson to her professor. Demi was also comfortable seeking help from professors. Early in the semester, she visited her English teacher during office hours. During this meeting, she learned about his background and shared information about her background. Yet, she was careful not to disclose too much because she did not want him to pity her. She also sought help from her British literature professor and loved participating in class because her views were validated. Later in the semester, she disclosed more information about her background with her British literature professor when she participated in an interview for her research.

Success. Demi drew on her inner strength and determination to be successful in college. Although she faced many barriers, they did not interfere with her progress toward her goals. She earned As in all her courses except chemistry, where earned a C. Although at the end of the semester, she did feel like she belonged at LUU, she felt like she belonged there more than she did at her high school. She also did not let it influence her success. She saw education as the path to a better life and would let nothing get in her way.

Christina

Christina is a Latina working-class female student. Throughout her interviews, she had a calm and relaxed attitude toward college. She aspired to be a mechanical engineer because she liked to learn about how things work.

Precollege environment. Christina's parents were both born in Mexico and they moved

to the United States when they were young adults. She lived with her mom, dad, and older brother in a predominantly Latina/o neighborhood. Her mother did not speak much English and worked as a cashier. Her father worked in construction. Although her parents did not make a lot of money, they prioritized education. For example, Christina took piano lessons when she was a child. Her brother did not finish high school. In the beginning of the semester, he was unemployed, but by the end of the semester, he worked with his dad in construction. Her parents strongly encouraged her, and her brother, to continue their education to help them out of poverty. Christina said that she did not notice that she grew up poor. She recalled being excited about free lunch at school and she attended schools with other students who had similar financial circumstances.

Christina attended a small predominantly Latina/o public high school. She admitted that she may not have gotten the best education, but she described that she received unconditional support from both peers and teachers. Christina also shared that she was depressed after taking the ACT exam. Although she scored in the 95th percentile, she still thought she would never get anywhere because she did not have money. Her teacher requested that she see a counselor, and since then, she approached her life with more optimism.

College selection and expectations. Christina applied to many highly selective universities but she only got accepted to LUU. She earned a scholarship that covered the full cost of tuition and fees. She was confident about her academic abilities since most of her courses overlapped with courses she had taken in high school. She was also eager to participate in student activities.

Transition experience. Christina's transition experience was smooth. She actively participated in student organizations and was successful in her courses. Though she was

frustrated with her larger courses, she was able to navigate the coursework by forming study groups, asking for help, and studying on her own.

University environment. Christina found the campus to be inclusive and diverse. She thought it was important to have a large Latina/o student population and she was glad to attend a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). She also commented, "It's pretty chill here. I don't feel any pressure from anyone I guess. People just kind of keep to themselves."

Situation. Christina struggled to pay for expenses beyond tuition and fees, such as her course materials. Two of her books totaled $200. She also worried about not having a laptop with requirements to run an engineering program that she needed for her course. Yet, she was also excited to have health insurance, which was required of all students, and a public transportation pass. Toward the end of the semester, she was also concerned about staying on pace to graduate in four years because she had not yet taken calculus. Thus, she considered enrolling in summer school. However, she expressed reluctance to take out loans for it. She also did not have a job while in college.

Self. Throughout her first semester, Christina was relaxed, positive and unfazed by challenges. She was also excited to learn and engaged in engineering student organizations.

Support. Christina had a strong support system as she entered college. For example, her aunt helped her fill out the FAFSA. She also heeded her high school teacher's advice and used the Latina/o student center to study. Furthermore, the scholarship program that she was connected to assigned her a faculty mentor. When he learned that she did not have a laptop, he arranged for his department to lend her one for the year.

Christina maintained strong connections with her family and friends from high school throughout her first semester. Although she did not discuss academics with her mom, she did

share stories about things that annoyed her. Additionally, her boyfriend and other friends from high school also attended LUU with her. She hung out and studied with them between classes. Christina also made a few new friends from her classes, but was she not concerned about staying in touch with them. She was satisfied with the friends she already had.

Strategy. Initially Christina struggled to keep track of when her online assignments were due and she missed quizzes and discussions taught by her teaching assistant. She said that the professors moved too quickly through the course material and she did not quite grasp the concepts. By the end of the semester, she studied with classmates, reached out to teaching assistants, and sought tutoring. She also formed a new habit to check for assignments daily.

Success. Overall, Christina experienced a smooth transition. She learned knowledge related to her major, she passed all her classes and earned good grades. Early in the semester she said, "I don't feel out of place here, because even though it's pretty different for my high school, I feel like the atmosphere is pretty similar." Ultimately, she felt like college was an extension of her high school and she felt like she fit in well.

Madison

Madison is a Latina working-class female. She was optimistic and had great passion for learning about people and helping others. Madison majored in sociology and hoped to become a social worker. She was inspired by the compassion her mom had shown people.

Precollege environment. Madison was an only child. During high school, her parents separated for a few years, causing her great distress. Her high school helped her get connected to resources for depression and anxiety. Before she started college, her parents got back together and they all moved in to her grandmother's house to save money to purchase a house. Both of her parents attended one year of college. Her mom had not worked in five years, since the

company she worked for relocated. Her dad worked for many years as a city outreach manager and has always been the primary source of income.

Madison was awarded a scholarship for tuition to attend a private all-women, Catholic high school. Her high school was predominantly comprised of middle-income, White students with a few Black students and even fewer Latina/o students. Yet, she had a diverse group of high school friends who were White, Black, Latina and from low-income families. She found the teachers inspiring and supportive. Madison loved her high school and served as an ambassador to recruit new students.

College selection and expectations. Madison applied to many universities within the city and ultimately chose LUU because it was most affordable. She received scholarships, grants and loans to cover tuition. Overall, Madison was both anxious and excited about college. She looked forward to meeting new people, but she anticipated that she would have trouble making friends. She also worried about the amount of homework and studying that would be required.

Transition experience. Madison initially struggled at LUU. She experienced stress and anxiety when I interviewed her during the first week of school. However, she quickly navigated college and was very positive by the sixth week of classes. Overall, Madison had a great first semester.

University environment. Madison liked that the campus was diverse with many Latina/o students. She also found students and staff to be open and accepting. She appreciated class discussions where she learned about peoples' diverse perspectives and engaged in thoughtful dialogue. She initially struggled with the size and structure of the campus, as she was used to having more guidance and opportunities to talk to peers and make friends. However, she put the responsibility on herself to adapt to and navigate the new environment.

Situation. Madison lived at her grandmother's house with her parents during her first semester of college. She enjoyed her classes. Madison had a few courses that had only a few students. In these courses, she engaged in discussions and learned about other peoples' perspectives. Madison's parents helped her buy books, but she eventually got a job because she wanted her own spending money.

Self. Madison was compassionate toward others and valued hearing about other peoples' experiences. She also described herself as very studious, hardworking, and shy. During the first few weeks of classes, she experienced a resurgence of anxiety. She was overwhelmed by the large class sizes, and she was concerned that she would not make friends.

Support. Madison's high school friends and her boyfriend attended a local community college. Initially she was frustrated that she did not have time to see her friends. As the semester went on, she grew less connected to her high school friends. Although they still talked via group chat applications, she found herself left out as they continued making new memories together. She did stay connected to her boyfriend and sought emotional support from him during midterms.

Strategy. Toward the end of her first interview, she had a revelation that other students might feel as alone as she had felt. By the sixth week of classes, Madison took initiative to reach out and make friends with her classmates. Also, before the semester started, she planned to manage college by focusing on academic and not apply for jobs or participate in campus activities. By the sixth week of classes, she shifted per perspective. She joined a Bible study group and found a seasonal job at a Halloween store. By the end of the semester, she was happy with the friendships she formed, but she still hoped to make more friends and get more involved on campus. She would often sacrifice sleep to get things done.

Success. Madison was goal oriented and committed to success. By the end of the semester, she continued to pursue a degree in sociology. She earned a 3.8 GPA. Overall, Madison had a positive transition experience. She felt like she belonged, made new friends, worked at her very first job, and successfully managed her courses. She also gained more confidence throughout the semester. She attributed her increased confidence to her peers and professors validating her ideas and opinions in class discussions. She also said that her writing skills improved because of the feedback she got from her English professor.

Anais

Anais is a Latina working-class female college student. She pursued a degree in sociology with an emphasis on gender studies, and she was very interested in social justice issues.

Precollege environment. Anais was raised by her mom and her stepdad. She did not know her biological dad. She has a younger brother and a much younger, five-year-old, sister. Anais's mom gave birth to Anais when she was 17 years old. Anais's aunt helped raise her and she grew up surrounded by a large celebratory family. She lived in a duplex with relatives in a low-income neighborhood. Anais described her family as not living comfortably, but not in poverty. Her mom worked as a referral clerk for attorneys.

Anais also had an influential kindergarten teacher who guided Anais's mom to enroll her in selective enrollment schools. In high school, she commuted about three hours a day to and from her high school. During high school, one of her best friends died of cancer. Anais was devastated and struggled with her mental health afterwards. Yet, she loved high school and was involved in a lot of activities. She traveled, participated in precollege programs, and worked at an internship. Anais was firmly committed to going to college as she wanted to give her and her

mother a better life.

College selection and expectations. Anais considered attending out-of-state schools, but they were too expensive. Ultimately she wanted to attend a school in the city. She was also drawn to LUU's central location and diverse student population. She looked forward to meeting new people and choosing her own classes. Prior to the start of the semester, Anais was nervous about her Spanish course because she was not a native speaker. She was also worried that other Latina/o peers would not think she was Latina/o enough. She also expressed that she would not know how to react if she saw racist or biased incidents in college.

Transition experience. Anais's transition was smooth and she was excited by her courses. Early in the semester she was worried about making friends. With time, she became close friends with peers who lived in her residence hall.

University environment. Anais described that she felt "culture shock" when she came to LUU. She liked that the campus was diverse, but she also struggled to fit in with other Latina/o students. For example, she did not understand why people used the N-word in their everyday speech. She was uncomfortable by it. Yet, she struggled to confront individuals about their behavior. She usually ignored it as she was uncomfortable with conflict.

Anais liked engaging in dialogue in her student organizations. Also, during the election, she felt supported by offices and by her professors. Yet, she did not feel that the larger campus was supportive. Specifically, she though that the campus email that explained why LUU could not be a sanctuary campus had a chilling effect on the student body. Thus, although she felt support in her courses, she did not feel that the university administration was supportive.

Situation. Anais lived on campus and she had her own room. She lived in a community-style residence hall, where students naturally interacted with one another with a shared bathroom

and lounge. She seemed to have a traditional college student experience. She did not work, participated in student organizations, and had engaging classroom discussions.

Support. Anais made a friend immediately when she came to LUU, but she struggled to make close friends. By the fifth week of classes, she developed friendships but she did not quite feel like she belonged on campus. By the end of the semester, she grew closer to the friends on her floor. Anais also had one friend who previously attended high school with her. While she was still forming relationships with her college friends, she relied on her high school friends. As her college friendships grew stronger, she relied less on her high school friends.

Anais also got involved in a Latina student organization and an LGBT group. She had trouble navigating how to get involved in other activities. Still, she had a good experience overall. She also was comfortable getting involved and navigating how to immerse herself into the campus culture.

She also maintained strong relationships with her family throughout the semester. Her family visited her often and even gave her money during the semester. A relative won a large settlement and gave Anais $400. Additionally, Anais did not worry about food because she had a meal plan.

Self. Anais liked having freedom to take courses that she was interested in and she seemed prepared academically. She was glad that she did not have to take math and science classes. Anais was a procrastinator and had many sleepless nights during her first semester. She struggles to get started on her papers because she was self-conscious about her writing.

Strategy. Anais was not one to seek help from others. For example, though she struggled in her courses, she did not seek help from anyone regarding her assignments. Instead, she worked at them for many hours. Anais was also self-conscious about her Spanish language

skills because she was a non-native speaker. Since the campus had a large percentage of Latina/o students, she felt even more self-conscious than usual about not being a native speaker. She even dropped her Spanish course because she was not confident in her abilities.

Success. Anais adjusted well to college. She had friends, was financially okay, and did well in her classes. She also felt like she belonged, and she learned about diverse groups in classes and in programs on campus. She also gained confidence. In addition, she met other students who felt self-conscious about their Latina/o identities. This helped her feel supported.

Layla

Layla is a White working-class female college student who was eager to learn and experience a world beyond the small rural community where she spent much of her life. She majored in political science and intended to go to law school.

Precollege environment. Layla grew up in a small predominantly White agricultural town. She described her community as racist. Her parents were never together. She lived primarily with her mom, stepdad, and younger sister. During high school, her mom and stepdad were a large source of stress as they argued a lot. She did not particularly like her stepdad but she tolerated him. Her mom had always worked long hours and had a long commute so Layla essentially raised herself and her sister. Her mom also suffered from alcoholism. During kindergarten, Layla was placed her with her dad by social services. She also spent summers with her dad who lived in the same city as LUU.

Layla expresses a positive outlook on life, but her stories reflect hardship and pain. She described growing up poor and always eating spaghetti and cheese dogs. Yet, she also shared that she was wealthier than others in her community. In school, she was teased and isolated for not having the right clothes. It was not until she got to high school that her experience improved.

She attributed the change to having more money because she got a job and her mom gave her the child support checks from her dad. Although Layla had many friends in high school, she did not relate to them. Her high school teachers inspired her and helped her apply to colleges.

College selection and expectations. Layla's decision on where to attend college was largely based on her finances. She confessed, "I'm going to be honest, when I started applying to college, this was my last choice. I got an email about the honors college and I was like, 'Okay, maybe this will work. They give out scholarships.'" She hoped that attending college would serve as a pathway to a more comfortable life and help her become more open-minded.

Transition experience. Layla's transition to college was also a time of great personal transformation. She grew confident, empowered, and humbled as she learned about social justice and got to meet many people from diverse backgrounds.

University environment. Prior to the start of the semester, she expressed excitement to be around so many people from diverse backgrounds. Yet, she was scared. She shared that she never had to think about her race describing,

> I actually had a girl that came up to me for our freshman dinner and asked me if I went to school here and I was like, "Yeah" and she said, "Well you look like you're here to babysit us." She was like, "I can never tell the difference between White girls."

This experience caused her to have a lot of anxiety about her own identity.

Self. Layla had conflict feelings about racial issues. She was frustrated that she did not have a scholarship that covered all her college expenses, like her friends of different races and ethnicities did. However, she refused to think of her friends as competition, as her stepfather suggested she should. Instead, she directed her frustration toward years of systematic injustices. She said that if she deserved a larger scholarship, she would have gotten one. Although she grew

up in a community that openly expressed racist views, she speculated that her own experience with poverty, having friends who were poorer than her, and spending summers in a more diverse community helped shape her mindset.

Situation. Although Layla had scholarships and grants, she also took out loans and paid nearly $2,000 a semester. She lived on campus. Initially she was stressed out about finances and applied everywhere to find a job. Early in the semester, she found a job on campus as a desk attendant early, and she worked about 25 hours a week to pay her tuition. Her dad also helped her by paying $200 a month toward her bill. Still, she was just getting by with no spending money. She was fortunate that she did not have too many expenses related to college since many of the required books were inexpensive novels. She also borrowed an I-pad from her grandmother to study at her job. She looked forward to the spring semester because her tuition bill would be lower. She stated that working so much negatively affected her experience. She had trouble finding time to join student organizations that met on campus.

Support. Layla also had a great support network when she entered college and she continued to build a network throughout her first semester. During the sixth week of classes, she shared that she actively sought out advice from her high school teachers about adjusting to college. She also sought advice from a friend from home who already attended college. Additionally, she spoke to both her parents multiple times a week. At the end of the semester, she shared that she relied on her teachers, friends, and family less. She increasingly used her instructors for academic support and mentorship. She also relied on a sophomore with the same major to help her manage her coursework. She was actively involved in the honors college and she wrote articles for an online college magazine.

Strategy. Layla was outgoing and open. For example, she instantly became best friends

with her roommate, who she met during her honors college interview and asked to room with her. She was not afraid to seek support or assistance from others. She was also used to being independent as she took care of herself growing up. She also took risks to advance her learning. These qualities helped her grow more confident during her first semester of college. Toward the end of the semester, she even challenged her stepdad for the first time ever about his racial biases.

Layla was eager to learn and be challenged. She found that the campus was largely supportive of her growth. As such, she experienced a personal transformation, stating,

> I think that I've started to look at everything, society more specifically, through a global lens. I'm a world citizen now. That's my identity. I belong to something way bigger than my skin color, or my gender, or my sexual orientation now. Now I'm someone involved in so much bigger. Yeah, I think that's what's changed the most.

Success. Initially, Layla was intimidated and frustrated that people thought she was narrow-minded. However, she took a course on slavery that helped her understand her experiences within a historical context. By the end of the semester, she realized that she had privileges, and she was eager to learn more about people and the world. At the end of the semester, Layla reflected on her experience in college. She admitted that she often made inappropriate comments without realizing that they were discriminatory. She stated, "I call myself open-minded because I was very open to things, but I was closed-minded as compared to a lot of the people that I go to school with now." Her personal growth served as a theme throughout her transition. Overall, Layla had a seamless transition where she made friends and gained confidence and knowledge.

Summary

In this section, I provided an overview of each participants' transitions to college. Though all 12 participants successfully completed their first semester, their experiences were vastly different. Some participants were more successful than others. Furthermore, their accounts suggest that the campus was diverse and inclusive. Furthermore, some classes were engaging and thought provoking; whereas', other courses were difficult to navigate with different structures and teaching methods than what participants were accustomed to in high school. Additionally, a few themes began to emerge regarding their strengths. Many participants sought assistance from others. Furthermore, many participants strategically navigated a complex system and persevered through difficult challenges.

CHAPTER V: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I describe my cross-case analysis. I begin this chapter by describing outcomes related to student success and describing how I divided participants into three groups based on first-semester outcomes. I then examine each group within three stages of their transitions. I begin by comparing their precollege experiences and expectations about college. Then I compare their first semester college experiences. Finally, I compare the outcomes of each group.

Defining Outcomes

As shown in their individual case descriptions, all participants were committed to their academic success and worked hard throughout their first semester of college. Although all 12 participants completed their first semester of college with high grades, their experiences varied greatly and not all participants achieved success as they defined it. Upon completion of individual case analyses, I compared outcomes for each participant. Specifically, I looked at three different types of data related to student outcomes.

First, I examined each participants' responses to the interview questions, "What does success look like for you?" and "What do you hope to gain from college?" From their responses, and created categories of success. I distilled that success included having a job that made them happy and financially stable. Additionally, many of them also sought to either help their parents or help others via their careers. Overwhelmingly, participants stated that, from college, they sought to earn a degree, make lifelong friends, have new experiences, learn new skills or gain knowledge, and learn from people from diverse backgrounds. See Table 6 for a breakdown of their responses. I also must emphasize that these questions were open-ended. I did not ask

participants to choose from pre-identified options. Thus, I cannot assume that participants did not find any of the factors important if they did not happen to mention it.

Table 6

Participant Defined Outcomes

	What does success look like?						**What do you hope to gain from college?**				
	Career	Financially comfortable	Happiness	Help others	Have family	Travel	Friends	Degree	Knowledge or skills	Diversity learning	Experiences
Jane	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Oneyda	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Nancy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Caroline	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Sky	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Mia	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X
Maria	X	X	X				X		X	X	X
Demi	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	
Christina	X	X	X	X					X		X
Madison	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Anais	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	
Layla	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	

I identified key indicators of success for each category. For example, to measure success for *degree* progress, I used number of credits completed, GPA, and selection of major. All participants had an idea of what major or field of study they wanted to pursue, though some participants had not yet committed to a specific major. I looked at included credits they initially attempted to highlight students who succeeded in all courses. Additionally, I noted which students took and passed developmental courses since they made progress toward their degrees even though they started out farther behind students who did not need developmental courses.

Because participants expressed excitement about college and many of them sought to gain friendships or new experiences, I also looked at factors that described their satisfaction with their college experience. These factors include whether they were committed to attending the university or if they had plans to transfer, as well as if they felt a sense of belonging at Large

Urban University [LUU].

Finally, I asked them about changes in themselves during the semester. O'Shea (2013) remarked that transitions often refer to a move from one place to another but they can also involve a person revising their identities, sense of agency, life significance, and self-concept. Thus, students not only experience transitions to a new college environment, but they also experience transitions of *self*. Although no participants initially stated that they planned to gain more confidence in college, I included confidence as a measure of success because eight students expressed that they were more confident at the end of the semester. Furthermore, all participants who gained confidence felt motivated and empowered by it. Confidence was an aspect of their agency and likely an enhancer of success. Similarly, some participants shared that they gained knowledge and skills, including learning from people from diverse backgrounds. As shown on Table 7, some students referenced no changes.

Based on these outcomes, I identified that participants could be divided into three groups. The first group, *struggling*, includes three participants, Jane, Oneyda, and Nancy, who did not achieve success in many of these outcomes at Large Urban University [LUU] during the first semester. The second group, *rising*, experienced partial success. This group includes Caroline, Sky, Mia, Maria, and Demi. The third group, *soaring*, were successful in all outcomes. This group includes Christina, Madison, Anais, and Layla. Although all participants completed the first semester of college, they did not all achieve the same self-defined success.

While examining patterns in coding, I drew concept maps for each participant to examine the relationships between their initial perceptions toward college, how they navigated college, and outcomes they achieved. I noticed that the group who did not experience success struggled from the onset. The rising group initially struggled through the fifth and sixth weeks, but

overcame challenges to experience partial success by the end of the semester. The soaring group started the semester strong and continued strong throughout the semester. They expressed a few transition challenges during the first week of class; however, these were resolved by the fifth and sixths weeks of classes.

I use Schlossberg's transition model to organize my analysis of each of the three groups' transition experiences. The first section explores each of the three groups' initial perceptions about college. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) had stressed that "Successful outcomes are seen as dependent on the person's perceptions of the transition" (p. 49). The second section focuses on the participants' first semester of college. Goodman et al. (2006) had asserted that the success of a person's ability to navigate a transition is the ratio of assets and resources to liabilities and deficiencies. Thus, I examine the resources and assets participants had compared to their liabilities and deficiencies. Finally, in the last section, I examine their outcomes after their first semester, including whether they achieved success as they defined it. Table 7 shows the outcomes each participant achieved by the end of the semester. Under the column, *made friends*, I used *F*, for forming, to separate those students who met people but expressed that they did not yet find their friend group. Under *learning about diverse people*, I also used *F*, for forming, to account for Nancy's and Caroline's emerging understanding of issues related to identity. Those who I marked *no* made no mention of engaging with or learning about people of other identities. Meanwhile, I assigned *yes* to students who clearly expressed that they had found their friend group or learned about a culture different from their own. Contrasts between the struggling and soaring groups are stark with clear differences in every measure. Meanwhile, the risers include students who have either achieved success in the classroom by gaining skills and knowledge or those who felt more a part of the campus

community by making friends or feeling as though they belong.

Table 7

Participant End of Semester Outcomes

	# of degree credits attempted	# of degree credits passed	GPA	Selected a major	Committed to attending university	Made friends	Had sense of belonging	Gained confidence	Gained skills or knowledge	Learn about diverse people
Struggling										
Jane	9[1]	6	--							
Oneyda	15	10	2.6							
Nancy	15	11	3.0			F				F
Rising										
Caroline	12	12	3.6	X	X	F	X	X		F
Sky	9[1]	9	3.0	X	X	X	X			X
Mia	17	12	3.2		X	F	X	X	X	
Maria	16	16	3.1			F		X	X	
Demi	11[1]	11	3.4	X	X			X	X	X
Soaring										
Christina	13	13	2.7	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Madison	16	16	3.8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Anais	18	15	3.8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Layla	13	13	3.7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

1: Not included in this total is a 4 credit Math 090 course that did not count toward their degree. The student passed this class.

Approaching Transition

Prior to stepping foot on a college campus, students' transitions have already begun. Students choose where to apply to college and, once admitted, choose where to attend. When examining participants' initial perceptions about college, I looked specifically at why they chose to attend LUU and what they expected during their first semester in college.

At the beginning of the semester, all participants stated that education was their path toward financial stability. They were laser focused on academics. Many of them prepared by taking rigorous courses in high school, enrolling in college preparatory high schools, private schools, or selective enrollment schools. They participated in activities, took precollege courses, took advanced placement courses, and worked with college-success non-profit organizations to ensure their success. All participants expressed that they were confident that they would do well academically despite a few areas of apprehension such as managing time or dealing with greater

workloads than in high school. Many participants were also excited to make new friends, have new experiences, get involved, and have more independence. In these ways, their attitudes mirrored those of more traditional college students. However, underlying these participants' desires to have traditional college experiences was a stressor: they felt they had no other option but to be successful.

Furthermore, they were limited by their financial resources. LUU was not initially the top choice institution for any of my working-class female participants. Rather, it was the most affordable option or the only institution that admitted them. Though many of them felt limited by their social class, LUU was quite possibly their most viable opportunity for them to achieve their goals.

The working-class women's perceptions about going to LUU varied. I was surprised to discover just how differently participants in the struggling group perceived Large Urban University compared to participants in the soaring group. Those who were in the rising group had mixed perceptions.

Struggling Group

All participants in the struggling group sought to attend institutions that they believed best aligned with their career goals. For instance, Nancy wanted to attend a private institution that would directly admit her to a nursing program and Oneyda had her sights set on the state flagship university because of its vast internships and connections to businesses. Jane did not plan to attend college as she tried to enlist in the Air Force. When she was turned away for medical reasons, Jane planned to attend an out-of-state school. All three participants in the struggling group ultimately chose LUU because it was the least expensive option available to them. Nancy and Oneyda saved money by living at home. Nancy grew more optimistic about

attending LUU when she was directly admitted to the nursing program, but she still wished she had the opportunity to live on campus. Onedya also expressed a desire to live on campus. Oneyda stated,

> I also wanted to go to [State Flagship University] because of the clubs. I don't know, I see more culture in [SFU] and it seemed more fun to me. I was actually about to go there but then because of the financial, like how much it was going to be, I decided not to. [LUU] was my choice because of it being a cheaper option. So, it's more like just going to school. I feel like if I would've gone to [SFU] it would've been better.

Yet, despite these unmet opportunities, they were committed to having successful experiences.

One way that students in the struggling group were different from the other two groups is that they discussed the possibility of transferring during their first interview, before their first semester started. For example, Jane thought about her aunt stating,

> She went to community college first then went over to Harvard. She got a scholarship, went in, didn't have to pay for anything. I feel like I should've done that. But I thought my scholarships were gonna be good enough. Now I realize tuition doesn't cover everything because I pretty much got a full ride, but there is like access codes, I-clickers and stuff that they want you to buy.

Jane was concerned by additional expenses beyond tuition. Furthermore, she still wished that she could have enlisted in the Air Force. Nancy was determined to be a nurse practitioner and would transfer if she could not stay in the nursing program. In her interview to gain direct admission to nursing she stated, “I would just transfer honestly, because nursing is what I want to do and I don't want to be held back just because someone or a school said we don't have space for you here when I can go somewhere else.” Oneyda was open to transferring to a school with a

stronger academic program and more opportunities to network with future employers. Furthermore, each woman in the struggling group had friends and boyfriends who attended more prestigious institutions. All three of them compared their own experiences to their friends' experiences and thought they were missing out on a more engaging campus experience. This weighed heavily on them later during their transition experiences.

Soaring Group

Although LUU was not the top choice of any participants in the soaring group, they all spoke positively of the institution initially. Furthermore, they were not particularly attracted to specific degree programs at other institutions. Layla fell in love with LUU at orientation and was excited to be in the honors college. Additionally, most of her friends from high school attended community colleges. Similarly, Madison insisted on attending a four-year institution; whereas, her friends from high school attended community colleges. Thus, they were not inclined to view their experiences unfavorably compared to their friends' experiences. Christina seemed to be thankful that she was enrolled at all since she applied only to highly selective schools and ultimately attended the only university that accepted her. As the semester progressed, she learned that her friends who attended other schools had trouble adjusting to predominantly White institutions. Additionally, Anais originally wanted to attend school in Hawaii, but it was too expensive. She ultimately chose LUU because it was centrally located in the city. Although her friends attended large, out-of-state institutions, Anais never seriously considered leaving the area, so she was not inclined to compare her experience to theirs. In fact, she sought to be in a large urban environment and could not imagine herself in a school that lacked diversity or was in a small town. She stated,

Out of all the colleges [in city], [LUU] has always been the most appealing to me and I

> think most of that is because it's kind of right in the middle of the city. One of the big things is, I wanted to be in the city for college no matter what. I wasn't really comfortable going to some nowhere-ville.

Although all four participants in the soaring group were financially restricted in where they could attend college, they had positive mindsets about LUU. Also, they did not perceive themselves as restricted. In fact, they did not seem to pay any attention to others' experiences as they were enraptured with their own experiences. The alignment of their needs with the campus environment helped the soaring group, and some in the rising group, focus on their own experiences.

Rising Group

All five participants in the rising group hoped to attend an out-of-state institution or the in-state flagship university. Four participants ultimately chose LUU because of cost. Maria was the exception. She changed her major to music at the last minute and decided to attend LUU because it was the only institution to which she could travel for an audition before the admissions deadline. Of the five participants in the rising group, only Sky's perception of LUU was similar to students in the soaring group. She expressed that that it was diverse, close to home, and where her sister attended. Meanwhile, Maria, Mia, Demi, and Caroline hoped to attend universities farther away and live in residence halls. All four of them had friends who attended larger, more prestigious institutions. Everyone in this group, except Caroline, was excited to be in college and hopeful they would have a great experience. Caroline, on the other hand, compared her experience to her friends' experiences at other universities. In this respect, she was similar to the strugglers.

One participant from the rising group, Maria, also expressed possibly transferring before

the semester had even begun because LUU did not have her ideal major, music composition. However, Maria also still was not confident about what major she would ultimately pursue. She purposefully chose LUU at the last minute to pursue a music program after initially only applying to biology programs. Thus, she had not yet attempted to apply to top tier music programs so she did not know where she stood.

Ultimately, Maria was satisfied with her decision to attend LUU because she was following her passion, but she still sought a program that better aligned with her interests. Furthermore, she was still uncertain about her major. Prior to the start of the semester, she expressed wanting to double major so she could pursue her passion, music, and another program with a more stable career outlook, such as healthcare. The other four individuals in the rising group were committed to earning degrees at LUU as they were not open to attending two-year institutions, and they knew that any other institution would have been much more expensive.

Summary

Based on my analysis of participants' initial impressions about college, it seems these working-class female students' success was related to how well the institution's reputation and programs aligned with their expectations of college. Anais, from the soaring group, cared about social justice and diversity so she was satisfied with her decision to attend a large diverse urban institution. Meanwhile, Nancy and Oneyda, from the struggling group, and Caroline, from the rising group, wanted to have college experiences where they lived on campus and were highly involved. Participants in the struggling and rising groups did not initially select LUU as their top choice institution because they did not have positive perceptions about it. For example, they did not associate LUU with prestige. In general, participants sought a campus with high quality educational experiences and a spirited campus environment. Participants' perceptions were

shaped by how well Large Urban University met their criteria.

Although participants were thankful that LUU was more affordable than most four-year institutions, they wished other institutions were more affordable. For example, I asked a few participants why they did not live in the residence hall at LUU. Nancy said,

> I think just because it's so unconventional to do it at [LUU] because it's horrible. It's nasty dorming. It's not worth the money that you're going to pay for there. You can pay the same amount for dorming at [another institution] and it's much better... so I'd rather live at home maybe one more year and then go to more of a setting of a real college experience and somewhere else.

Thus, affordability and the perception of the college experience shaped their decisions. For many working-class, first-year students in the struggling and rising groups, attending LUU served as a reality check that they were restricted by their incomes and would have non-traditional college experiences. Five participants who were commuters stated that their experiences at LUU were similar to high school.

My analysis shows that participants' initial perceptions were associated with how well they transitioned to college. Their initial perceptions may have influenced how they managed situations they encountered in college. For instance, by considering what their experience could be like elsewhere, they may have struggled to fully engage at LUU. For instance, Nancy compared her experience to her high school friends' experiences. I speculate that though she made a few friends, she was not satisfied with her experience because she was not going to football games and parties like her friends at other campuses. Another possible explanation is that these first-year students had astute insights about their needs, challenges, or barriers. Participants in my study, similar to so many college students, desired to attend highly selective

institutions because they are associated with higher outcomes (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Even though Jane considered attending a community college, she hoped that afterwards she could transfer to an Ivy League university like her aunt did.

Transition

The first semester of college is marked with many changes for students. In high school, all participants had strong friend groups, teachers with whom they were close, and were very involved in extra-curricular activities. In college, not only did they have to adapt to the new course formats, but they also had to build new social support networks. For the working-class female first-year students, the first weeks in college were jarring. However, as time progressed, many participants were successful. I use Schlossberg's transition model to understand what contributed to their success. I look closely at their assets and resources as well as their deficits and liabilities. In this analysis, I discovered a few patterns. The success of the participants' transition experiences was largely dependent on a number of factors including course formats, finances, professors and teaching assistants (TAs), college friends, non-university support, student organizations, and themselves.

In this section, I offer an overview of the participants' initial impressions about college. Then I explore each subgroups' collective first semester college experience. I examine each subgroup separately using Schlossberg's 4 S System (Goodman et al., 2006) to explore their resources, assets, and liabilities. These factors illuminate why each group achieved different degrees of success.

Participants' Initial Impressions

Most students faced some type of adjustment in college as they wrote longer papers, attended fewer classes fewer days a week, planned for gaps between classes, had longer time to

complete assignments with fewer reminders, and did not have attendance taken. Specifically, during their second interviews during the fifth and sixth weeks of classes, many of participants commented on the structure of their courses. Two types of classes largely affected participants' experiences: large lecture classes and smaller discussion classes.

Large classes. An important distinction was the type of course in which they were enrolled. All participants struggled to adapt to the large lectures. Chemistry classes had between 200 and 300 students and math classes had about 100 students. Jane offered, "It just depends on how big the class is, because I feel like in the bigger classes you're just a number." Notably all three participants from the struggling group had large classes.

Not only did participants react to the size of the classes but they were also surprised by the teaching methods. Students who took in math and science courses struggled with the teaching methods. Caroline shared,

> I was really confident going into it. I was like, I can do this. I'm used to a hard curriculum because of my high school, but I've been getting more introduced to harder topics, like College Algebra. We covered that in high school but here it's just much more advanced. I thought I was pretty ready for it, but then everything is so different, the way you learn, the lecture style. It's really hard to ask questions. Even the homework, it's all either online or in… everything's so different.

Participants shared that they were used to teachers working through problems on the board in high school rather than learning via lectures and slides. For example, Oneyda reflected,

> My professor has a different teaching style than what I am used to. I learn through visuals and also by him doing it step-by-step. But he just stands there and he talks about it through a PowerPoint instead of going on the board and doing the problem itself.

Caroline and Mia also expressed frustration that large lectures move too fast and that pop quizzes were given on the same day that lessons were taught. The students commented on the large discrepancy from how math and science were taught in high school compared to college. Participants who took chemistry in college enjoyed it in high school; however, they struggled in college. This showed in their grades, as all students who took Chemistry their first semester at earned C's except Caroline, who earned a B.

Small classes. In contrast, participants enjoyed their smaller humanities and social science courses. Students who had humanities and social science courses felt that they engaged in meaningful dialogue in class and made friends. Madison commented,

> I feel like all my professors are really accepting of what you say. They're really open-minded. If they ask you a question, they kind of acknowledge your opinions, and then it makes you want to participate more because they're really encouraging.

They also felt comfortable going to their professors to ask questions and gain feedback. O'Shea (2015) and Nuñez (2005) similarly found that their working-class female participants sought nurturing and engaging instructors. Additionally, Hughes and Smail (2014) and Steele (2010) found that students preferred interactive and small group activities rather than large lectures and appreciated support from faculty and staff.

Participants were surprised that professors freely stated their opinions. For example, Sky shared, "The professors have way more leeway to say what the heck they want. They're definitely more opinionated in regards to politics and whatnot because they have the freedom to be." Furthermore, these first-year students shared that they were engaged in thoughtful discussions and some participants commented that their opinions were validated, giving them confidence in their intellect.

Peers. Except for participants who came to college with a lot of friends from high school, the working-class female students were surprised at how much trouble they initially had making friends. They were not prepared to have different classmates in every class and then not see them again outside of classes. Many of them had been with the same friend groups throughout high school and did not know how to approach people or start conversations. For example, Anais shared, "Making friends has been a bit hard but just because I'm really uncomfortable approaching people, so that's really rough for me." They also commented that people did not seem approachable, friendly, or interested in making friends.

Furthermore, participants were surprised that students in their courses lacked of academic focus. They were also taken aback by rude behaviors or immaturity of their classmates. For example, Oneyda commented,

> I'm a little bit more mature. Honestly, I've been seeing a lot of people that, they're not mature. They are really immature and they're still in college…a lot of people will try to give us that mindset that you will be more independent or mature when you're in college and all of that. But after seeing other people, like other people that have or are currently in college. But I still have that mindset that you still have to be mature.

Additionally, Caroline and Christina were annoyed by cocky behaviors of some of their male classmates. Furthermore, participants were surprised that college was not more academically focused. Demi commented,

> I meet a lot of lazy people here. People want a degree, but they don't want to do the work for it. They don't study. They don't want to go to class, and then they're like upset about failing when they don't go to class. And it's like, you get what you put in and you're not putting in anything so how do you expect to pass.

Additionally, five participants were surprised by how often students partied. Demi commented, "If we actually study harder, we could be a top school but you guys would rather party. I don't get it." Her comment is illustrative of my working-class participants' commitment toward academics.

Diversity. Most students also commented on the diversity of the student body at the institution. Two students who attended predominantly Latina/o or Black high schools perceived the university to be less diverse than they expected. For example, Mia shared that LUU had fewer Latina/os than she expected. Furthermore, she stated that she was not used to seeing White or Middle Eastern people. Meanwhile, students who attended predominantly White high schools, including Madison and Nancy who are Latina, and Layla who is White, found the diversity of the campus inviting. For example, Madison stated, "I can actually talk to someone about something that we do in my family and they do understand and it kind of helps me make more friends as well because you have a shared background." Similarly, Baber (2012) in his qualitative study Black students' transition experiences found that students who attended predominantly White high schools felt connected to the university through having groups of Black friends for the first time. Even participants who attended diverse high schools noticed that the cultural composition of the campus was different from what they were used to in high school. A few students commented on seeing students wear hijabs and seeing more Asian students. In general, all my working-class female students from different races and ethnicities were exposed to new cultures at LUU.

With this general overview, I explore how each group navigated their first semester of college. I specifically break down their experiences in accordance with the 4 S System and then summarize each groups' ratios of assets and resources to liabilities and deficits (Goodman et al.,

2006). I begin describing each group's transition experience by first explaining the situation. Two aspects of their situations had a major influence on participants' experiences during their first semester–finances and academics. Because students in this study had few financial resources, they worked, sacrificed eating, commuted, and lived at home. Many studies have examined how finances and academics influence the transition experiences of working-class students. My analysis offers depth in understanding how working-class female students manage these two aspects of their transition experience. Then, I examine their university support and non-university support. I end by describing their strategies and self.

Struggling Group

Each participant in the struggling group faced a series of challenges during their first semester. I summarize this group as students who started college with deeply held feelings of doubt, as described in the Approaching Transition section, but excitement toward the new journey as well. By the fifth week of classes, Nancy and Demi were cautiously optimistic. They did not yet feel as though they belonged, but they were willing to give it more time. Oneyda, on the other hand, already wanted the semester to be over. Finally, by the third interview, at the end of the semester, they all seemed exhausted with the realization that their college experience was nothing as they had hoped it would have been. Many opportunities were missed to help these students transition. Overall, this group is illustrative of how working-class female students from different races and ethnicities are affected when student engagement is not fostered.

Situation. The struggling group faced many circumstances that influenced their engagement on campus. Furthermore, they had few institutional resources to help them navigate their challenges.

Finances. Most significant to the experience of participants in the struggling group was

their financial situation. All three of participants received substantial financial aid packages comprised of scholarships, grants, and loans. Yet, Jane was in distress about her finances during the fifth week of classes. She asked, "What does tuition cover?" because after enrolling, she also had to pay for fees, books, an I-clicker, and access codes. Additionally, she was still waiting for her financial aid to disburse. She was selected for verification and had to first supply her parents' tax information to the financial aid office. She went the entire semester without ever receiving financial aid.

Oneyda was also worried about money. In her second interview during the fifth week of classes, she told me that she had applied for jobs because she wanted to help her family pay tuition and she had to pay for fuel and insurance for the car that her dad gave her. Though she thought her family's financial situation was improving, she did not want to be a burden to her parents. In October, Oneyda got a job in her desired field working in the information technology department at a public school. However, this also meant that she immediately went to work after classes. Thus, she was not on campus during the day to study with peers or visit professors' office hours.

Nancy also worked many hours a week during her first semester of college. She worked with a scholarship program for high school students on weekdays; however, she still had time to be involved on campus. Eventually, Nancy got a second job working evenings during the holiday season because she struggled to get involved on campus and had nothing else to do. Nancy reasoned that saving money would allow her more opportunities in the future. She did not want to be restricted in what she could do.

Though the three participants had different experiences related to finances, they all thought considerably about their financial status during their first semester of college. Their

financial status influenced their daily activities and planning throughout the semester.

***Academics*.** The three participants in the struggling group enrolled in all major prerequisite courses and general education courses during their first semester. Participants in the struggling group did not take courses that more closely aligned with their majors. Oneyda commented,

> I feel like maybe I will start having more fun in college once I start doing my major. Right now, it's just gen eds., like math, English, and all that, which is the same thing we would do in high school. I think once we start talking about majors and everything, that might interest me. I think it might be more fun.

Thus, in many ways, college felt like high school to the strugglers, only with different class formats and teaching methods. Furthermore, the three women struggled in their math classes. At LUU, each math class consisted of a lecture of about 100 students which was paired with additional discussion sections taught by teaching assistants. Nancy expressed,

> I really don’t like that class, but I have to get through it this semester. It’s a prereq., so I’m pushing through it. I really hate this class. I hope they don’t make me take a similar type of stats class.

Oneyda shared similar sentiments stating, “Well, sometimes when I can't get the material, I get pretty mad at myself. I don't know, I really want to understand math. I feel like it's some language from space that I just don't understand.” Both participants were especially discouraged by their first experience with math in college because they were both pursuing fields that required additional math courses. Meanwhile, Jane described, “My grades are good, but not good enough because I could not get the access code for math.” She knew the material for her math class but her financial aid issue prevented her from purchasing the access code for online

materials. Thus, she could not complete any homework assignments.

University support. Early in the semester, each participant sought assistance from multiple individuals at the university. Unfortunately, the support they received was insufficient to help them overcome barriers.

TAs. Participants in the struggling group did not have strong TAs. Oneyda and Jane both sought help from their TAs but the short replies they received led to them to pursue other avenues. They were already struggling and felt vulnerable, so they chose instead to figure things out on their own. Furthermore, Nancy's discussion class was led by TAs who refused to help. She described, "TAs are like, 'If you don't understand this then I don't know how you're going to get through this class.' I'm like, 'I'm asking you because I don't understand it.'" Instead of helping her, they questioned whether she was capable of learning. Jane also talked to her TA about not having the access code for math class. The TA told her to talk to financial aid, but Jane already was having trouble with her aid. Jane felt dismissed and was uncomfortable disclosing her personal struggles with finances. Oneyda thought her TA was more approachable than her professor, but even she struggled to get the support she sought. She said,

> I feel that he explains it better than my professor. And I've only gone up to him once, but he was in such a hurry. He didn't really have time for me at the moment, and his office hours land on the hours that I have class so it doesn't work well.

All three women sought more support from their TAs. However, the TAs either did not respond to students' calls for help, use a supportive approach, or have enough availability.

Professors. Two of my three participants in the struggling group did not have many interactions with their instructors. All three were required to interview an instructor. Jane and Oneyda struggled to engage with their instructors beyond this. Nancy was an exception. Nancy

worked on math on her own and then visited her math instructor weekly since she did not get support from the TA. Nancy described her statistics professor as very approachable and willing to take time to help her understand the material. In contrast, Jane expressed, "It just depends on how big the class is, because I feel like in the bigger classes you're just a number." Jane sought genuine connections. Both Jane and Oneyda felt that their instructors were disinterested.

Tutoring. Oneyda also tried tutoring, but she struggled with the group tutoring format. She needed much more support than she could get in this structure. She hoped to have someone's individual attention to help understand the material.

Peers. All three participants struggled with peer relationships but in different ways. Nancy hoped to study with friends, but she had trouble making friends. Nancy did make a friend during the semester; however, they did not have math together and they did not hang out outside of class. Thus, their friendship was primarily limited to their chemistry class. Onedya, on the other hand, started out with a strong social network since a few of her high school friends also attended LUU. However, when she got a job, she no longer had time to see them. Though, she did study with one friend toward the end of the semester. Oneyda shared,

> I do talk to my best friend which we're in the same math class, and we're both struggling so are constantly talking about it. At first she was doing a little bit worse than me, but she started getting the hang of it, so I'm going to ask her to help me right after this.

Even this strategy had limitations since this friend did not understand the math much better than Oneyda. No participants in the struggling group had peers on whom they could rely for mathematics support.

Jane was used to making friends by people approaching her. Unfortunately, she did not have a roommate in the residence hall, and she stayed in her room alone most of the time. She

did have one friend from high school that she hung out with early in the semester, but the friend dropped out. Jane never quite navigated how to build relationships, which could have led to study groups. Participants in the struggling group not only lacked friends to help them learn math, but they also lacked strong social networks overall.

Student Organizations. All three struggling participants intended to get involved in student organizations. Jane tried out for a dance team, but did not make it. She also briefly played Frisbee, but she said she could no longer make practices when they relocated practices due to campus construction on their field. Nancy suppressed her apprehensions and joined a sorority hoping to make friends. She said, "I was really excited to go into it because I was excited about meeting other girls or at least finding some of my place at [LUU] finally." However, she eventually quit the sorority because she realized that the members were not as academically focused as she wanted her friends to be. She said,

> I don't want to be stereotypical but a lot of the girls that were in it just didn't seem as motivated to, you know, get through college. There were a lot of girls that were almost going to be seniors and were still undecided about their major…. I want someone who's smarter than me just so I can keep pushing myself. A lot of them seem to party every Friday and I'm just like, you know I want to go out, maybe once in a while, but I kind of want to be the person who sits in on Friday and does homework and watches Netflix.

Oneyda also attended an event for women in engineering prior to the start of the semester and joined a Bible study during the semester. However, she stopped attending it when she started her job. Despite their efforts to reach out, the struggling participants were unable to build social support networks.

Non-university support. Though participants did not experience the degree of

university support that they had anticipated, they did have non-university support to help them through the semester. Unfortunately, participants also experienced limitations and challenges with their non-university support networks.

Family. Though Jane, Oneyda, and Nancy had family challenges during their first semester of college, their families were also their largest support networks. No participant relied on their families for academic support. However, they all relied on their families for encouragement.

Jane's family was at the center of her biggest challenge in college. She went the entire semester without her financial aid disbursing because her mom had trouble accessing her tax transcripts. Though her mom purchased Jane's I-clicker and other materials, she did not buy Jane the access-code to her math materials. Additionally, Jane's dad suffered from a car accident during the semester and was briefly in a coma. Yet, Jane's family served as her emotional support system, with her grandmother giving her a place to stay when she wanted to get away from campus. Jane talked about her mom's support, stating, "She gives me advice and sometimes just listens and that's all that needs to happen sometimes." Overall, her family visited often and encouraged her.

Oneyda's brother was incarcerated in October which caused her great stress, and led to her family selling a car and spending all their money to bail him out. Subsequently, Oneyda worried that she would not be able to pay her last tuition payment. Though her dad ultimately helped her with the last payment, she also sought other resources to make the full payment in time to sign up for spring semester courses. Yet, her family also served as inspiration. When Oneyda contemplated dropping out of college, her dad disclosed that he had similar doubts when he attempted college and withdrew during the first semester. Oneyda was inspired that her dad

tried college, and she felt motivated to keep going.

Finally, Nancy constantly battled with her mom who she described as strict and controlling. Nancy felt stifled because her mom did not allow her to go out on her own or stay on campus past 7 p.m. Though Nancy battled with her mother, she also was deferential to and inspired by her. Her mom divorced her dad when Nancy was in fourth grade because he developed alcoholism and spent the family's money. Her mom raised—soon to be—four college-educated women on her own, despite not being able to work because she was disabled. Nancy also had great support from her sisters who often offered to help pay for academic expenses to ensure Nancy had everything she needed to be successful. Nancy, however, was comfortable managing her own money and she relied on her sisters more for emotional support. For example, when Nancy struggled to make friends, they helped her maintain perspective that, with time, she would find friends. All three families were supportive in participants' transitions to college.

Friends. All three participants in the struggling group were in strained long distance romantic relationships during the semester. Oneyda's boyfriend was in Mexico and had no way to return to the United States. Jane's boyfriend attended a prominent historically Black college and she wished should could have attended a school near him. Additionally, her boyfriend also experienced challenges; thus, she could not rely on him as she once had. Nancy especially struggled since her boyfriend was completely immersed in his college experience. She felt left out and mistreated by him so she broke up with him. Yet she still desired the connection that they once had.

Furthermore, they had mixed experiences with their high school friends. Nancy's friends had experiences that she wanted to have. She explained,

> My boyfriend is one of those people who is super quiet, and my best friend from high school, she's just exactly the same where she's really quiet and it was easier for me to talk to them. But now it kind of seems like they're having the times of their lives, and they're like, "oh, I'm going to parties, I'm doing this…" but they're still managing and juggling their homework, which is good, but they don't have to be commuting to and from, they don't have that extra time where they need to put up. They just walk back and forth in the dorms.

Furthermore, Nancy's friends eventually moved on without her as they did not hang out with her when they returned to the city over their fall breaks. Oneyda also lost touch with her high school friends but she continued to look at their social media messages and saw them enjoying their college experiences. Finally, Jane built a strong connection with a high school friend who attended a nearby college. However, this friend failed her courses, so she was not a source of academic support.

Though participants in the struggling group had different experiences with their friends outside of college, they similarly did not find strength or support from such friends. Rather, their former friends served as reminders of the strugglers' own challenges in college.

Internship programs. Oneyda had a unique resource, a college success program, that she joined in high school that helped her throughout her first semester. This program purposefully supports disadvantaged youth by providing students internships at major corporations during their senior year of high school. Oneyda worked at an executive recruiting firm in high school. She stayed connected to this program during college as it offered support workshops, mentors, emergency funds, and job announcements. They sent her the announcement that landed her the IT job at a local public school. Furthermore, her mentor introduced her to a major that did not

require many math courses. Finally, when she did not have funds to pay her final tuition balance, they gave her an emergency loan. This internship program resolved Oneyda's major challenges during the semester.

Strategies. Though participants in the struggling group faced many challenges, they employed similar strategies. They all sought help, tried to get involved, studied a lot, and worked through problems. For example, when Jane could not afford the access code for her online math assignment, she emailed her professor about financial aid and talked to her TA about the access codes. Jane hoped for more guidance, but when her concerns about being just a number were somewhat validated, she pushed through on her own. She sat in her room for hours and taught herself math so that she was prepared for the quizzes and tests. She missed all homework assignments and settled for a lower grade because of it. This showed not only her determination, but also how much she struggled to navigate resources when people were not invested in her. Ultimately, Jane strongly considered attending a community college to resolve challenges associated with her finances.

Nancy was persistent in reaching out to instructors as well as in trying to make friends in her classes. Nancy also worked on her stats class at home, researched how to do problems, and visited her professor weekly. Though Nancy probably could have passed her math class, she felt pressure to maintain a 3.4 GPA so that she could stay in the nursing program and the honors college. Therefore, she dropped the course and strategized when she could retake the class to stay on pace to graduate in four years. She planned to enroll in summer school. Furthermore, during the fourth interview, after completing the first semester, Nancy considered alternate degree programs that would be easier to get into if she lost her admission into the nursing program. Thus, she constantly considered back up options.

Oneyda's experience was similar to Jane and Nancy's experience. She sought assistance from her TA for math. She also sought tutoring but did not get the type of help she needed. She could not find someone who would teach her at her own pace. She even sought the help of a friend who also struggled. Though she ultimately failed the class, she strategized to take her required math courses at a community college to get more individualized attention. Oneyda also found a major that would allow her to work on computers but would not require her to take many math classes. No participant began their college journey with low aspirations. However, they all modified their goals to address real challenges in their lives.

Self. All three participants were eager to attend college and be more independent. Yet, they did not seem to fully comprehend what this meant. For example, Jane waited for a long time for someone from financial aid to reach out to her before she realized that she would have to initiate communication. Additionally, Jane and Oneyda were accustomed to teachers who gave them more individual attention and were interested in their lives. For example, Jane shared, "My high school, they were really supportive of students. If you are ever having problems, several teachers would go after you and they'd be like, 'hey what's going on? What do you need us to do?'" Thus, they were suspicious of professors and TAs who did not demonstrate the same level of interest in college. Furthermore, Oneyda thrived on collaboration in high school and was resourceful in using her friends to support her academic success. She shared,

> We would help each other. This person knows a lot of math and you would go help ask them for tutoring, you know. I would take the advantage of the fact that some of them knew more science, some of them knew more math, and we all helped each other as much as possible.

Ultimately, they all sought a more nurturing environment.

All three participants were surprised by the demographics of the university. When I asked Jane what she struggled with, she said, “The cultural shock when I got here. It just took me aback when I just couldn't find anybody that looked like me at first. I was like, what is this?” Jane expected to see more Black people. Oneyda knew LUU was going to be more diverse than her high school, but she still found it awkward to talk to people from the wealthier suburbs who did not share similar experiences to her. All three participants in the struggling group attended high schools that were not diverse. Jane, who is Black, attended a predominantly Black high school, Oneyda, who is Latina, attended a predominantly Latina/o high school, and Nancy, who is also Latina, attended a predominantly wealthy White high school. Nancy had friends from different backgrounds; yet, in college, she struggled to find her place as she did not fit in with the Latina/o students. Nancy’s transition to college also forced her to think more about her identity. On numerous occasions, she rejected her Latina heritage and desired to be around people from different ethnicities. She reasoned that her values more closely aligned with individuals from different races and ethnicities, yet she was deeply connected to her Hispanic heritage as illustrated by her statements about the presidential election. She shared, “My friend’s family voted for Trump, so I think they forget that I... You know what the problem is? They forget that I’m Hispanic way too much!” Yet, she still longed for their friendships despite having different ideological backgrounds from them. She had only just begun this journey toward understanding her identity.

Summary. All three participants in the struggling group had challenges connecting to instructors and friends. Jane and Oneyda faced overwhelming financial challenges that limited their involvement on campus. Nancy, on the other hand, was so desperate to establish a social network in college that she almost joined a sorority despite initially criticizing them. Nancy did

not join any identity-related student organizations because she did not feel like she fit in with Latina/o students. Rather, she was more comfortable being unique for her Hispanic identity within a predominantly White culture. In college, she no longer held this status and struggled. Additionally, Nancy had limited time to make friends on campus because she worked during the day, and her mom did not allow her to stay on campus during evenings. These three participants largely relied on themselves to navigate their first semester of college.

The three struggling participants did not draw on many university resources. Rather, they relied heavily on themselves and on non-university support to make it through their first semester. All students were high achievers in high school, and overcame some type of adversity in college.

When examining the ratio of assets and resources to liabilities and deficiencies, these participants struggled within a non-nurturing environment, had few academic support resources, and had financial, social, and family challenges. Yet, they also had support from their families. Most importantly, these three participants had incredible assets that allowed them to overcome many of these barriers. They were driven to success, were resourceful, intentional in their planning, and motivated. Although they did not have the same outcomes as the other two groups, they did complete the semester despite facing many challenges.

Soaring Group

Each participant in the soaring group had strong university support as well as non-university support. They also had assets that helped them thrive during the first semester. This group can of students started out the semester excited about college. Though they all expressed nervousness about their new journey, many of their concerns were resolved by the fifth and sixth weeks of classes. They all felt like they belonged on campus within the first month of the

semester. At the end of the semester, they were more energized about their college experience. Layla shared that her experience was better than she expected. These students found the institution environment to be nurturing and they flourished, growing more confident. Overall, this group is illustrative of how working-class female students from different races and ethnicities are affected when higher education professionals provide a validating and nurturing environment.

Situation. Though the participants in the soaring group were also of working-class backgrounds, they started the semester positioned better than participants in the struggling and rising groups.

Finances. Madison, Christina, and Anais each earned a merit-based diversity scholarship of $2,500. Layla was also pleased with her financial aid package as she also earned scholarships, though not as substantial as the others. Christina, who did not live on campus, was granted enough financial aid that she did not have to take out loans. Meanwhile, Layla, Anais, and Madison each took out loans. Layla, who lived on campus, also had to pay $2,000 per semester. Madison, who lived off campus, had to pay $500. Of the four participants in the souring group, Anais likely had the largest financial aid package, as scholarships, grants, and loans covered the full cost of tuition and housing.

Anais and Christina did not have jobs during their first semester which allowed them more time to become immersed in university activities. Anais also received money from her family during the fall semester. Similarly, Christina did not seem concerned about money as she was content that she had health insurance and a bus pass.

Meanwhile, Layla worked on campus at the recreation center. Though she wished she had more time to get involved activities, her work experience had many advantages as she did

not have to commute, she could study at her job, and she also made friends with coworkers. Yet, finances were tight for her, as all her income went toward paying her student bill. Madison also got a seasonal job in October at a Halloween store so she could have extra spending money. Though she was busy on weekends during that month, she did not think it took away from her overall college experience since she usually spent weekends with her family. Furthermore, Madison also made friends at her job. Overall, her work experience allowed her to have spending money when she hung out with friends on campus.

Academics. Unlike participants in the struggling group, all participants in the soaring group were enrolled in at least one class directly related to their majors. All participants discussed being engaged in their classes and feeling excited about learning. For example, Anais said,

> There are things in my classes that I've done research on my own time because I'm interested in it, and it will show up in class, and I have the ability to talk about that. That makes me feel really great, and it also just takes away the burden of being in school because I'm actually learning things that are interesting to me that I probably would've looked up anyways.

Anais mentioned that she studied on her own because she was naturally interested in her courses. Similarly, Layla applied knowledge she gained in her slavery classes to her own experiences with people from diverse backgrounds on campus. She said,

> I think it was just the environment I was in in that course. I finally realized that I shouldn't be scared to speak my mind just because of my position with someone. If I feel so strongly about something and I see how it's being told wrong or it’s wrong, then I should be able to speak up. I shouldn't be scared of it.

Meanwhile, Madison got to learn from students from different backgrounds in her Catholicism class. She attributes the discussions in this class to helping her be more open-minded. She described,

> We had people who weren't even Catholic. We had different people. We had some Jewish people that kind of put their input on that. Then we had some Latina/os speak up about it and also people from different races so it was a really great discussion. I learned a lot about different people and what they thought about the election.

Finally, as an Engineering major, Christina enrolled in all science, engineering, and math classes. Though she expressed a lot of frustration in learning new material and having challenges with TAs and professors being consistent, she was overall pleased with her learning. She liked learning about how things work and said, "I just get very excited when I finally understand something. I'm like, 'oh my God it's crazy.' It happened today in math class. I was like, 'I didn't know that!' Yeah definitely I'm excited about knowing more." Overall, they were all pleased with their learning during their first semester in college.

Madison, Anais, and Layla also had small classes in which they got to know their instructors and engage in discussion. Madison described, "I feel like all my professors are really accepting of what you say. They're really open-minded. If they ask you a question they acknowledge your opinions, and then it makes you want to participate more because they're really encouraging." Layla, Anais, and Madison, all had all humanities and social science classes. Layla's largest class had 40 students in it.

Of the four participants in the soaring group, only one participant, Christina, was enrolled in a math class or science class. Christina also enrolled in a supplemental instruction math class which only had about 15 students. She said, "It's just a supplementary thing. It was optional to

do, but I like that one a lot because you get to ask specific questions and go deeper into what you're wondering about with each topic. I think that one really helps." With this opportunity for more individualized attention, she was not as frustrated by the size of her math class as were many other participants.

Christina did have challenges with the size of her Chemistry class. She shared, "Sometimes someone will raise their hand and then the professor just keeps going, so I think it's a bit harder to ask for help in that class." She mentioned during both her second and third interviews that she found the professor moved too quickly during lectures and she had difficulty asking questions in class. Table 6 shows that her GPA for the semester was a 2.6. This is because of the C she earned in her five-credit chemistry course. Although Christina is in the soaring group, she experienced similar challenges to the other groups with regards to her chemistry class.

University support. Early in the semester, each participant reached out for assistance from multiple individuals at the university. Though they overall had mixed responses, in totality they had much more support than participants in the struggling group.

TAs. All four participants in the soaring group were taught by TAs. Their experiences were mixed. Layla reflected on an experience in a first-year dialogue seminar where she asked about a definition of a word. The TA snapped at her, implying that Layla was homophobic. Layla was angry that the TA leaped to judge her in a course so she chose expand her knowledge. It bothered her for days. Christina also shared an account of her TA who covered material too quickly, and then sighed in annoyance every time a student asked a question. Thus, she would not ask him questions in class.

Yet, Christina still visited her TA during office hours and found him helpful. Likewise,

Madison had positive experiences with her TA who led discussions in her Latina/o cultures class. She shared that the TA validated her opinions and made her want to participate more. Overall, the soarers' satisfaction with their experiences with their TAs were related to the TAs openness to working with them.

Professors. Participants in the soaring group also had mixed experiences with their professors. In the beginning of the year, Layla visited her professors. She said that these visits led her professors to hold her to higher standards. For example, one professor asked her to help edit other students' papers. Both Madison and Layla described that their English professors provided a lot of support when they went to office hours to get help on their papers. In contrast, Anais had not visited any of her professors. She said that she simply did not have a reason to do so.

The only student who struggled was Christina. She tried to visit her engineering seminar professor, but she could not figure out when her professor would be in her office. The professor did not have office hours listed, so Christina repeatedly just showed up hoping she would be in.

All participants who took humanities courses discussed that their professors made them feel comforted after the 2016 presidential election as well. For example, Anais said,

> My humanities teacher has been very, very adamant about the fact that she wanted people to come to her if they felt unsafe over things like that. It was really cool for her to make that announcement. She talked about it a little bit. I feel like on individual basis, it's a lot more welcoming.

Anais was concerned about the overall campus climate because of hurtful comments made by students on Facebook after the presidential election and the university president's announcement that the campus could not be a sanctuary campus. She said her instructors made her feel

supported despite feeling like the campus administrators did not care. Two participants brought up that they were upset by the campus announcement that LUU would not be a sanctuary campus. Participants felt disappointment toward the institution because of it.

Tutoring. To learn how to do conversions in Chemistry, Christina went to tutoring for a few hours each week for a month. Tutoring helped her have a breakthrough in her learning which led to her performance improving toward the end of the semester.

Mentors. As a part of the LUU scholarship, Christina was assigned a faculty mentor who was an associate dean in engineering. During their meeting, early in the semester, Christina disclosed that she did not have a laptop to do assignments on her commute. The next day, her mentor emailed her with instructions on where to pick up a computer. He had his department loan one to her for the school year. Christina's experience with technology is in stark contrast to Jane's experience with her math access code. Neither of them had the money to purchase materials to be successful, but Christina had a supportive network to gain access to resources.

Peers. All participants in the soaring group developed strong peer connections within the first few weeks of the semester. Similarly, Stuber (2011) found that peer connections were significant to working-class students' having positive college experiences. Christina and Madison made friends via group projects and small group discussions which led to them participating in study groups. Madison, who had severe social anxiety specifically commented,

> In some of my classes, we've been put into groups to do group work, and I found that was really beneficial because I got to meet more people and make more connections. I've hung out with a couple of people outside of class.

Christina also developed a substantial social network in her engineering student organizations where she had the opportunity engage with peers on project teams. Although many peers were

not in her classes, she relied on them for academic support.

Layla and Anais largely developed their social networks in the residence halls with students who were not in their classes. Layla's peer relationships contributed to her overall learning as they challenged her understanding of racism and systematic oppression. Furthermore, upper-class peers gave her advice to stick with her courses early on when she was feeling overwhelmed. All students in the soaring group developed strong social support networks with new friends.

Student organizations. Three participants in the soaring group were involved in student organizations on campus. Anais joined a Latina student group and a LGBT group. Layla participated in honors events and joined an online women's magazine. Christina was involved in a Latina/o engineering student organization and a motorsport organization where she got to build race cars. All soarers described either being socially active or learning in their student organizations. Christina gained hands-on engineering skills, Layla learned more about global women's issues, and Anais learned about issues in the community related to a specific Latina population. Madison also joined a Catholic Bible study group where she learned of other students' hardships; however, she eventually quit the Bible study when she got a seasonal job. Overall, all participants in the soaring group sought out organizations associated with their identities.

Non-university support. Though participants in the soaring group experienced some challenges with their non-university support network, overall these support networks were very positive and supportive.

Family. All four participants in the soaring group had a lot of support from their families. Although none of them had family members who could help them work homework or

help them navigate college, they all talked to their families about their college experiences. Specifically, they vented to their families when they struggled during the semester. Furthermore, Christina and Madison spent a lot of time hanging out with their families. Additionally, although Anais and Layla lived on campus, they both talked to their families many times a week. Even Layla, who was disinvited to her family's Thanksgiving because she had decided to challenge her stepfather's racist views, still talked to her mom and her biological dad many times a week. Thus, each participant had a supportive foundation in their families.

Additionally, all four participants in the soaring group also relied on their families financially. Layla's dad gave her $200 every month to partially pay for tuition, Madison's family paid $500 toward tuition, Anais's family gave her spending money, and Christina's family helped her buy books. Thus, all participants in the soaring group relied on their families for both financial and emotional support.

Furthermore, all four participants in the soaring group had extended family members who were in invested in their lives. Similar to Christina, Layla did not have money for materials to help her study but she was able to borrow her grandmother's I-pad for the academic years so she could study at her on-campus job. Additionally, Christina's aunt completed her FAFSA, Anais's aunt gave her money, and Madison lived with her grandmother while her parents saved money. Additionally, Christina was the only participant in this group that had an older sibling, and he dropped out of high school. Thus, not only were the participants in the soaring group first generation students, but they were also the first in their families to attend college.

Friends. All participants in the soaring group maintained connections with their high school friends. Christina had the benefit of attending college with her boyfriend as well as a few other friends from high school. Furthermore, they all had friends who attended schools farther

away and stayed connected to one another via group chats and texting.

Whereas participants in the struggling group still relied heavily on their high school friends throughout the semester, participants in the soaring group did not rely on these relationships as heavily. At the end of the semester, the soarers commented that they did not talk to their friends as much as they did in the beginning of the semester. Even Christina, who had friends at LUU, stated that she did not have many classes with them and grew closer to students who were in her classes. Yet, friends from high school continued to play important roles in the soarers lives. Each student carved out time to continue these relationships over breaks and during occasional group chats. The experiences of working-class participants in my study align with the experiences of first-generation students in Terenzini et al.'s (1994) study. They found that first-generation students' precollege friends acted as a bridge for students during the transition to college.

Strategies. Though the soarers expressed feeling stress related to academics and finances, these challenges did not seem to consume their experiences like they did for the strugglers. Instead, participants in the soaring group were more immersed in learning. Yet, participants in the struggling group began their semester hoping to be at a campus that better supported their academic goals.

Each participant in the soaring group employed strategies that helped them step out of their comfort zones to address the issue that made them uncomfortable or served as a barrier. Furthermore, they received support and encouragement. For example, Anais and Madison found ways to manage social anxiety to make friends. Madison explained,

> I felt like I didn't fit it, like I wasn't going to make any friends. But that's how I think it is for a lot of people in the first couple weeks. Then you start adjusting to the classes and

> you start talking to more people.

Furthermore, Christina managed her apprehensiveness toward engaging with professors to ask for help in engineering and chemistry. Prior to the start of the semester, she shared, “I'm worried. You know how people always tell you talk to the professors during this time? I’m like, ‘okay but what do I say?’ I'm working on it.” As the semester continued, she contacted many resources to ensure her academic success. Additionally, after finding an on-campus job, Layla’s largest challenge was experiencing her whiteness at a racially and ethnically diverse university. Prior to the start of the semester, she confessed,

> I'm White and going to a school that's so diverse. I actually had a girl that came up to me for our freshman dinner and asked me if I went to school here and I was like, “yeah” and she said, “well, you look like you're here to babysit us.” She was like, “I can never tell the difference between White girls.” And I was like, “oh my gosh, people are mean to White people.” I've never gone through that. I think that’s going to be one of the hardest things.

Layla also struggled to understand structural injustices and often made naïve offensive statements. Yet, she was open to feedback from her peers and her professors. At the end of the semester, she reflected back and said, “I called myself open-minded because I was very open to things, but I was closed-minded compared to a lot of the people that I go to school with now.” All participants conquered personal challenges that contributed to their learning.

Self. An interesting characteristic of all participants within this group is that, in high school, they did not ask others for help. They all shared that their first strategy was to work at something for a long time. In contrast, all three participants in the struggling group were used to teachers approaching them to offer help. Furthermore, Nancy was also very comfortable seeking

help from others. In the college environment where autonomy is so central, perhaps participants in the soaring group had an advantage by having advanced skills in resolving problems on their own.

In general, the four participants in the soaring group were academically focused with a strong sense of self. They were committed to being independent and working things out on their own, but they also could navigate resources successfully with little prompting or support. They also all had a healthy understanding of the roles of friends in college. They each had a friend group that they relied on for general and academic support. Yet, they were not consumed with making friends. Perhaps this was because they each established social networks early in the semester.

All four soarers described the campus as diverse, and they perceived diversity to be positive. For example, Anais commented,

> It's really awesome to see different students being represented on campus. At my high school, there were no students who wore a hijab. There were absolutely none, but here there's a whole community of people who wear hijab, so for me, seeing them represented is really awesome to me.

Even Christina, who attended a predominantly Latina/o high school said, "[LUU] is pretty diverse anyways. I mean my big thing was that my high school was like 99% Hispanic, and then here I still see Hispanics." Meanwhile, Madison was happy to be around Latina/os for the first time in school and Layla experienced tremendous growth in her understanding of privilege and systematic forms of oppression.

Finally, they each felt connected to the campus community. They were all drawn to their coursework and, overall, found their professors engaging. Similar to other participants in STEM

courses, Christina did not build as strong of connections with her professors as the other three soarers, but she did establish connections with Latina/o student organizations.

Summary. All four participants in the soaring group had strong support networks during their first semester of college. Furthermore, they had assets such as their commitment to working hard and agency to overcome personal barriers to ensure their success. Though their liabilities, such as their finances, were not dissimilar from participants in the struggling group, opportunities and support networks prevented finances from playing dominant roles in during their first semester of college. Layla arguably faced the largest financial burden, but she was used to taking care of herself and making due with very little. Furthermore, she worked at an on-campus job that also supported her integration into the campus community. A major difference between the participants in this group from participants in the struggling group was that the soarers were all in courses related to their majors. As illustrated in the above sections, they were also invested in their courses and learned new knowledge.

This group both experienced personal growth related to their identities but also gained knowledge related to their ultimate career goals.

When examining the ratio of assets and resources to liabilities and deficiencies, these participants experienced a nurturing environment, had academic support resources, and had financial, social, and family support. Most importantly, these four participants had assets that helped them to overcome many of these barriers. They were driven toward success, were resourceful, eager to learn, and motivated. This group serves as a model for what working-class students need to be successful during their first semester of college.

Rising Group

The students in the rising group experienced a range of challenges and support. This

group can be summarized as students who started out feeling excited and ready for college but, by the fifth and sixth weeks of classes, were overwhelmed. Yet, by the end of the semester, they were more calm as they began to overcome some of their initial challenges. None of the participants in the rising group experienced all the outcomes that participants in the soaring group had, but they also were not as disappointed about their experience as the participants in the struggling group had been. Overall, this group is illustrative of how the institution can play a key role in the success of working-class students, who typically experience less success in college than students from higher social classes.

Situation. Participants in the rising group faced similar challenges related to their finances and academics to participants in the struggling group. However, they ultimately relied on resources which helped their experiences improve as the semester went on.

Finances. All five participants in this group received scholarships of varying amounts. Sky, Mia, and Demi all were granted enough scholarships and grants where they did not have to take out loans or owe money to the institution. Sky's funding even supported her to live on campus. Demi and Mia lived off campus and both received excess checks to pay for living expenses. Mia's refund was a little over $2,000 per semester whereas Demi's was a little over $400.

Maria and Caroline also lived off campus. They each earned scholarships, but they also had to take out loans. Maria took out about $3,000 per year in loans and paid about $500 toward tuition. Though she was confident that she would be able to manage this amount of debt, she was very focused on trying to pursue her education as inexpensively as possible.

Caroline had the largest financial burden of all participants in all groups. She received $1,500 in scholarships per semester and took out the maximum amount of loans. Her mom still

paid $3,000 toward tuition buy using a credit card. Caroline said that her dad's job distorted their income on their her forms, making her ineligible to receive more financial aid. Her dad was a truck driver who owned his own truck as an independent contractor; thus, he paid for all business expenses out of his income. She explained, "It looks like we make a lot of money, but in the end, it's way less than that. I didn't get much financial aid or anything. It kind of sucks. Now I'm paying more than my family can actually afford." Thus, Caroline's FAFSA showed that the family made more money than they actually had available. Caroline felt the squeeze of being a working-class student who was just over a financial aid threshold to receive grants. The family income she reported on my demographics questionnaire was higher than all other participants. Because she was so concerned about finances and paying bills, she worked 40 hours a week.

Finances were a large factor for all participants in the rising group. Whether they worked or not, they were concerned about spending money. Although Mia did not have a job, she also did not have a newer phone, shared a computer with her siblings at home, and strategized about how not to spend money in college. She relied on her parents for daily living expenses as she was careful not to spend too much of her financial aid excess check.

Although Demi also received an excess check, she still had to get a job because she was responsible for many household bills. Demi had lived her entire life in poverty and was not able to rely on her family for any financial support. She sought campus employment early in the summer, well before she started college, to help manage her finances. Sky also was determined to find a job when she came to college. She initially struggled to find employment. During the fifth week of classes, she attended campus events that had free food and was unable to participate in residence hall activities where students used their own money. She felt left out.

After working at two different jobs that only offered up to 4 hours a week, Sky finally found a job in the student center at the end of the semester where she would work 20 hours a week. Additionally, Caroline and Maria focused on paying off their loans during the semester.

Caroline's health declined because of concerns about finances and her challenges navigating her schedule. For example, she stated,

> At my high school, we had free lunch. Coming here it's like, I don't eat as much as I used to in high school. Right now, I'm starving. I had nothing to eat all day so I'm like… I don't have time to eat. Like in the morning, I get ready. Maybe I'll have some cereal. I'll rush in the car and go to class and then I have to go to work so I don't eat until 9 p.m. or something, so I'm toughing it out.

Furthermore, she explained, "Sometimes, on my way to work, I'll stop by somewhere on drive through and pick it up. But also, it like adds up you know if every day you're going, five dollars. It just is too much money."

Academics. Except for Maria, all participants in the rising group were enrolled in either math or chemistry courses. Mia, Caroline, and Sky were enrolled in large prerequisite and general education courses. Similar to participants in the struggling group, the students in the rising group did not indicate that they were engaged in their classes.

Like strugglers, Mia, Caroline, and Sky also had difficulty with the structure of their STEM courses. When I asked Mia about challenges, she shared,

> I think it's in between chemistry and pre-calculus because the professors read off the Power Points and they have daily pop quizzes and exams, so it's a lot to cover. It's hard for me to study for those courses and still get my homework done for other courses.

She also offered,

> I thought lectures were just going to be where the teacher's talking or providing examples, but it's worse. The teachers are looking at the Power Point, everybody's trying not to fall asleep, and if you don't get it, you will teach yourself.

Sky explained that she talked to a lot of her professors. Then she explained, "except the only ones that don't really know me as… I would say Math and Macro because they're really big classes." Caroline was stressed out about being given pop quizzes during the same day of the lesson. Her scores on the quizzes were bringing down her grade. However, she was fortunate that her professor changed teaching methods midway through the semester and stopped giving pop quizzes on the same day of the lessons. Caroline also had concerns with her math professors who did not provide grades until five weeks after students submitted their assignments.

Demi also enrolled in a large math class but her experience was different from the other risers. Demi purposely enrolled in a course lower than what she tested into because she sought more preparation for the next course. Although she did not earn credit that counted toward her major for the developmental math course, she did find it easy and earned an A.

Caroline, Mia, and Demi were also all enrolled in chemistry courses. Like Nancy from the struggling group, Caroline, Mia, and Demi initially felt confident in chemistry because they had knowledgeable and inspiring chemistry teachers in high school. However, as the semester continued and the lessons surpassed the knowledge they gained in high school, they all struggled in chemistry. They also described studying a lot for chemistry. Caroline explained,

> I just knew I wasn't going to do good and I tried to study. I stayed up late that night until like 12 or 1 a.m. I really tried to study for it but I don't know. It was just so stressful to me because I knew that if I bombed this it would bring my grade down to a C, but I did. I did bomb it.

Maria and Demi both spoke highly about their smaller classes. Demi enjoyed her British literature and writing course. She was originally enrolled in an African American literature class but it was cancelled due to low enrollment. She shared,

> I love my British literature class. I didn't think I was going to love it because it is British literature and I studied it in high school and I was like, "Why am I taking this now again?" But I actually like it. We read Jane Eyre. I think I told you about that. That was really, really… that was a good book.

Though Demi was a nursing major, she was drawn to humanities courses because they addressed topics related to personal struggles and social injustices. Since she hoped to be a nurse for poor communities, she related these courses directly to her career goals. Meanwhile, Maria had many small one-credit courses directly related to her major. As the semester progressed, she could see her skills improving.

University support. Early in the semester, each riser sought assistance from multiple individuals at the university. Though they received mixed responses, in totality, they had more support than participants in the struggling group.

TAs. Mia described that her chemistry TA was more approachable than instructor. However, the chemistry TA was only available one day a week. Mia also found her psychology TA helpful. Sky, on the other hand, was frustrated by her TA. She explained,

> Even though I went to the review session. The TA completely sent us off. He was talking about stuff that was not even going to be on the exam, saying it like it was and people studied those things and so many people did really, really bad. Like really, really bad! I'm never going to one of those again.

Similarly, Demi spoke to the inexperience of her TAs. She said,

> I don't like my discussion because my TA, she does not let us discuss anything. She just talks and I'm like, "Can we talk? Can we discuss the answer?" She just gives us the answers. She doesn't ask us, "What did you guys get?" and "Why did you think this?" I think it would be more helpful if she asked why do we think a certain way.

Demi's dialogue first-year seminar TA struggled to strike the right balance to cover a lot of material about privilege and race while allowing sufficient time to facilitate meaningful discussions. Demi also was frustrated that her chemistry TAs forgot to pass back assignments.

Professors. Participants in the rising group found that their professors were knowledgeable but not approachable. For example, when I asked Mia if she asked her chemistry professors for help, she said, "Yeah, and I try to ask the professors but they give you very brief answers." Furthermore, Mia feared asking questions in her classes because she felt like the professors would expose that she did not understand as much as others understood. Sky and Caroline also expressed the same insecurities about asking for help in class. However, neither of them asked questions of their teachers in high school either, whereas Mia was used to seeking a lot of support. Mia went from being a student who always asked for help in high school, to someone who did not ask for help at all in college. Ultimately, Mia dropped her math class. Caroline said that she wanted to visit her professors' office hours to seek help, but she did not have enough time. Yet, she did take off work to participate in bake sales and dance practices for her student organization. She may have not been comfortable asking for help, or perhaps she was confident that with extra studying, she could figure it out. She could study at any time; however, she could only attend student organization events during their scheduled times.

Participants in the rising group had an easier time reaching out to professors when their instructors were perceived as more approachable. All rising students reached out to their English

professors. Even Demi, who was comfortable posing questions to her math professor, felt closer to her humanities professors. Demi expressed that she would stay in touch with her British literature professor after the course concluded. Even Caroline, who reached out to no professors for help with course materials, chose her English professor to complete an interview assignment. Mia, who was frustrated with her chemistry and math professors, felt differently about her English professors. She offered, "My English instructor, she's very into contact. Like you can reach out to her at any time." Thus, rising participants who were both highly and minimally engaged relied on their English professors as their largest source of support among the faculty.

Demi was not very connected to LUU. For example, over the semester, she struggled to make friends, was not involved, did not live on campus, and did not feel as though she belonged. Yet, she loved her courses. She enjoyed her professors so much that her experiences in her courses may have compensated for her lack of peer connections on campus. For example, I asked her about what parts of college were positive or rewarding. She replied,

> Meeting with my professor and going to office hours. I went to office hours for my academic writing class. I didn't really need it. I just did it for extra credit so my grade could be higher, just in case I miss something. So, I got a chance to talk to him one on one and it was way different from class, because in class he tries to pay attention to everybody. It was like more personal, like we could actually discuss who I am and who he is.

Demi also felt that she was learning, growing, and making progress toward her goals. Maria shared a similar sentiment about her singing skills and musical abilities. She said,

> I think with all of the music classes I've been taking, I've definitely seen an improvement in my abilities. Seeing that improvement, it helps me know that I'm going in the right

direction.

Maria was excited to develop relationships with her professors and see her musical skills advance. Furthermore, she grew more confident as the semester continued.

Tutoring. Caroline planned to seek tutoring but had no time. By the fifth week of classes, Mia tried many tutoring centers but she struggled because they were not available as often as she needed them. Furthermore, they did not have tutors for her level of math. Initially she had higher expectations about what resources would be available to her. Eventually, she discovered that she could go to the honors college tutoring center and the science tutoring center. She also used the writing center for help.

Peers. Participants in the rising group tried to navigate their transitions by studying with friends and getting involved on campus. Sky and Caroline made friends in their classes. Sky, who lived on campus, found her friend group in October. She described, "They actually live on the second floor. I have the same math class with them…and we kind of just met through our demands and studying I guess for math. We all became really close friends." Sky also hung out with a residence hall cluster-mate early on. However, they often commented about challenges with the campus culture and about their struggles. Sky liked that her cluster-mate was genuine and had come from a similar background, but ultimately she sought to be around people with whom she could be authentic, but also who were engaged and had positive experiences at LUU. Ultimately, Sky found a close group of friends that helped her feel positively about her experience.

Caroline made a friend early in the semester who also was in her chemistry lecture and lab and English course. They hung out on campus and occasionally studied together. Furthermore, he brought her food. Caroline explained,

> I don't have time [to eat]. My friends have noticed and started bringing me food because they feel bad. This one friend, in English, because I always complain about how I'm hungry in English, he started bringing me snacks. He brought me dried mango and nuts or whatever. And he's like, "You're always hungry." He's like, "Eat something." And I'm like, "I don't have time."

Though Caroline made this connection, she still usually studied on her own, if she made time to study at all.

Demi also tried to make friends in her classes but she struggled. Eventually she found a few friends with whom to study; however, one tried to cheat from her, so she stopped hanging out with her. She also described why she could not stay friends with the other one. She declared,

> Then I met this other girl, but she was a Trump supporter and I was like, nope! Sorry, I can't do it. I just… I'm okay with people having different opinions about stuff, but that's one thing I cannot, I cannot deal with. I was like, "You're okay but not friend material for me."

Mia and Maria had friends from their high schools at LUU. Prior to the start of the semester, Mia was not friends with peers from her high school and was in great distress because she could not connect with anyone socially. She almost considered withdrawing from school. However, by the fifth week of classes, she formed friendships in college because of their common experiences at a predominantly Latina/o high school. Mia shared that they talked about the different culture of LUU. They also studied together. She shared,

> I've actually found out that I've had some of them for my courses and then from there we would study together and they would bring friends or not. From our teachers'

> assignments, we would have peer edit. From there we would just get along.

Maria had one friend from high school that she maintained in college. They were close to one another and discussed general experiences, but they had different majors and no overlapping classes so she did not use this friend for academic support. Maria expressed a lot of frustration throughout the first six weeks of the semester because she was not able to make friends in her classes. However, Maria eventually made friends with other students in her choir class. She explained,

> I think it was just circumstance. Because I know when you're in class it's kind of hard to connect with other people. I know with choir you have the choir concerts, we had three of those this semester so there was a lot of time for me to get to know everybody else in the choir.

At the end of the semester, she commented that she still was not as close to them as she would have liked to have been. However, she knew that if she were around them more that they would probably grow closer.

Interestingly, Sky and Mia befriended students who also were from working-class backgrounds whereas Caroline, Maria, and Demi did not seem as concerned about making friends from similar social classes. Perhaps it had something to do with their exposure to people of different incomes in their high schools. Caroline, Maria, and Demi all attended selective enrollment schools, whereas Sky and Mia attended high schools where many lower income students attended.

Student organizations. Sky and Caroline were the only participants among the risers that got involved on campus. Yet, all participants expressed wanting to be involved. Subtle barriers seemed to interfere with their engagement. Demi explained,

> The objective of the [high school] clubs is way different from the objectives of a student organization. I feel like a student organization actually has things that they want to achieve. A club is just like for fun. I also feel like attendance is very important for a student org. opposed to a club. If you don't go, it's not going to be like, "Well you didn't come last time, you know we are going to kick you out now." You make it when you can make it.

Thus, she had preconceived notions about the objectives of student organizations. Maria never joined anything. At the end of the semester, she confessed, "I think part of it was just me scared of meeting other people. And I just tried to justify a reason for me not to go." Mia purposefully did not get involved because she was nervous about her academic abilities. She wanted to focus solely on academics; however, she intended to get more involved in the future because she perceived that people who were more involved seem to enjoy their experiences in college more.

Like the participants in the soaring group, both Sky and Caroline joined identity related organizations. Sky joined an African student organization where she discussed current events and helped put on cultural programs. Caroline joined an Asian organization though she did not identify as Asian. She did have a few friends from high school in the organization but, at the beginning of the semester, she still expressed a lot of anxiety because she was the only White student in the group. She explained,

> Then we have a meeting for [the org.], which is when you're introduced to your big brother/big sister. That was really stressful for me because I was worried that whoever was going to get me was going to be disappointed that I'm White cuz everyone's Asian.

However, she also had the foresight to know that it would take time to develop relationships and trust. This mindset seemed to help her weather the initial discomfort. As she suspected, she

eventually got to know more people and shared common experiences which allowed her to feel more a part of the organization.

Non-university support. As illustrated in the above section, participants in the rising group either experienced support among their professors and TAs or support among friends. Similarly, they also experienced a range of challenges and support with their non-university support networks.

Family. None of the participants in the rising group talked to their families about their classes. Among this group, only Mia relied heavily on her parents for emotional support. Furthermore, all participants in the rising group experienced some type of family stress. Caroline's relationship with her parents was complicated. Her parents were supportive but they also fueled her concerns about debt. She overheard them complain about expenses associated with her college education. At the same time, Caroline said,

> She didn't save anything for college. She just assumed I would go to community college. She should have known as soon as I went to [a selective high school] that I wasn't going to go to community college. But then she'll go out and buy everything. I'll look at her Amazon history. She'll go and buy all of these things. Like she doesn't use them. She doesn't need them. All of that could have saved up for a month, to pay for a month of college. My dad got a new car and I'm like, "What's going on?"

Though Caroline's complaints may seem entitled, they are more likely a reflection of her being overly stressed as she also expressed guilt that her parents were burdened by her tuition. In her second interview during the fifth week of classes, she broke down and cried. She was exhausted, tired, thankful for her parents' support, and wished she had more support.

Caroline also felt pressure to either go to a community college or pursue a major that

would offer a more direct path to financial wealth. Maria also felt pressure to please her parents as she pursued her career goals. Yet, in general, Maria's family was supportive and positive toward her education. Mia also felt pressure by her mom to become a physician but she just could not handle the math and science course. Similarly, Mia's family was supportive and stood by her as she decided to change her major. Mia stated, "My mom wanted me to do premed, but I couldn't handle it. I think she noticed that as long as I enjoy doing what I like, so for example psychology, she's willing to give it a chance."

Sky's family was supportive and loving but they also were also a distraction. I asked her when she was most stressed and she replied, "When I'm trying to get work done and my phone was like getting blown up by calls from either my mom or my friends that needed to vent or whatever." After so many years living in a highly structured boarding school environment where she was perceived as a leader, she just sought space to focus on herself.

Finally, Demi's family was a major source of stress. She had grown up in poverty, with a mother who suffered from severe mental health challenges. Her mother was incapable of taking care of Demi or her siblings. She explained,

> Me and my mom got into an argument a few months ago because she wanted me to give her $200. I was like, "$200 every month? That is ridiculous." At that point, I wasn't even making the minimum wage, I was only making eight dollars. Then I got a raise so my income is a little bit better, but I'm still not gonna give her that kind of money. It's ridiculous because I already contribute to paying the Internet and cable bill. And yes, those are luxuries, but I need the Internet for school so I have to pay the bill and then she doesn't give me money towards her TV bill so I have to pay that too. I already have to pay that and then I have to pay my phone bill so I'm like, "No, I'm not giving you $200."

> And I have to buy stuff for the baby because my mom doesn't buy it.

Demi had a younger sister who had a baby during the semester. Yet, Demi loved her family despite the challenges and would do anything to support them, especially her new nephew.

Interestingly, Maria, Sky, Mia, and Caroline all had older siblings who had attempted college. Sky's older sister had been successful but the other three risers had older siblings who struggled and stopped out in the past. Perhaps the risers felt increased pressure from their families because their siblings struggled in college. They also may have worried that, like their siblings, they too would struggle.

Teachers. As illustrated in the previous section, Demi had the least supportive family as she provided support to them. Her high school chemistry teacher seemed to substitute the role of family support for Demi. Demi shared,

> We talk on the phone once a week for about an hour or two and then we try to meet once a week as well. At first it was going well and then the semester happened. Then I got off track, but now we should be meeting once a week in addition to the phone call because we're in this co-counseling thing together.

Demi relied on her high school chemistry teacher for both emotional support and chemistry help. Furthermore, the high school chemistry teacher also tutored Demi in college chemistry, thus, assuming the role often filled by a college professor or tutor.

Friends. All participants in the rising group were connected to their friends from high school throughout their first semester. Specifically, Mia, Caroline, and Maria attended LUU with friends from their high schools. Furthermore, they all maintained friendships on chats and looked forward to seeing their friends over breaks. Demi and Sky even went to visit their high schools during the semester. Whereas participants in the soaring group seemed to rely less on

their high school friends, participants in the rising group maintained steady relationships with their high school friends.

Stuber (2009, 2011) also found that students who had trouble socially adjusting to college maintained friendships with high school friends. She attributed their struggles to the friendships. However, I found that their high school friends served more as a bridge because participants had yet to form strong friend groups in college. For example, Nuñez (2005) found that seven of her nine participants reported that friendships from high school were important to their transitions to college.

Strategies. Each participant in the rising group was fueled by the will and drive to be successful. They found ways to succeed academically while also addressing other priorities such as paying for school, having an engaging campus experience, and making friends.

Mia and Caroline pushed through challenges on their own. Caroline managed a challenging schedule by not studying, sleeping, or eating. I asked her what caused her stress and she stated, "The workload. Since I have the two jobs, I don't have time to study. I have two exams and I did not study for either of them because I didn't have time so that's the main thing." Yet, she prioritized participating in the student organization and even scheduled time off work to go to events. Caroline made sure she would achieve her campus involvement, academic, and financial goals by largely sacrificing her health and well-being. Mia similarly sacrificed sleep. Though she was not as busy, she had to navigate sharing resources with her family. She explained,

> Once I get home, I will wait for them to finish their homework on the computer so that I can focus on mine without any worry of time. Then there's just times when the material that we're covering is much harder than expected and I spend a lot of time studying.

She said that she slept about three to four hours a night. During finals week, she slept for one to two hours each night for a week.

Mia also reached out to professors, formed study groups, and sought tutoring. Unfortunately, like Nancy in the struggling group, these strategies were not enough and Mia ultimately dropped her math class and changed her major to avoid taking future math classes.

In contrast to Caroline, Mia intentionally did not get involved on campus so she could focus on her well-being and academic success. Though she wanted to join a student organization, she was aware that she lacked the academic preparation and rigor from her high school. Mia had the lowest ACT score among participants; however, using resources available on campus, she successfully navigated college and earned a 3.2 GPA. Thus, her academic drive helped her despite not having strong academic preparation.

Sky and Demi strategized how to have steady incomes and manage their finances. Demi sought employment during the summer and found a job on campus. Sky, on the other hand, struggled to find employment that offered her enough hours. Early in the semester she could not find employment so she lived frugally. She eventually had to ask her sister for money. During the sixth week, she started her first job. She continued applying to jobs until she found one that offered her 20 hours a week. She found one at the end of the semester.

Demi managed college, despite having an unsupportive family, by spending most of her time on campus, and asking her high school teacher and college humanities professors for help. Both Demi and Maria reached out to faculty for support. For example, Maria was academically successful as she worked closely with her instructors and practiced music a lot.

Finally, Maria did not face her social challenges head on. Rather, she denied that she was shy and, instead, found a new job to fill her time. By the end of the semester she reflected on her

semester and admitted her apprehensiveness to meet new people. Although she did not see herself as proactive toward making friends, her confidence grew as she experienced small successes. Though participants in the rising group did not initially have the best experiences, they each strategized how to do well.

Self. Four risers faced significant challenges growing up, which may have primed them to overcome challenges in college. For example, Demi grew up in poverty. She explained, "I know that the way we live is not how the typical family would live. That has inspired me to work harder and break the cycle because I don't like it at all. I don't like our living conditions." Caroline's parents worked a lot when she was growing up so she pretty much raised herself. Her parents also do not speak English which further fueled her independence. Additionally, Sky attended middle and high school at a non-profit boarding school for disadvantaged youth. Thus, she also had to function independently. She was exasperated by this experience. She explained,

> People were like, "You should be going into management. You'd be a great manager because you are always a leader." I was just like, "No I don't want to manage anything else." I want to do anything else but lead for once.

Additionally, Mia described having a supportive mother but she shared that her mom was very distracted by her sisters growing up when she struggled academically. She explained, "Around sixth grade, I just started reading on my own. I just started mentoring myself and looking for online tutors. I was determined to get straight As." Furthermore, she was motivated by her family's hardships. She explained that people would always talk rudely to her mother because she did not speak English.

Maria was the only participant in the rising group who did not share experiences of great hardship growing up. Though her parents had working-class jobs as a factory employee and a

custodian and she lives humbly in a duplex beside relatives, she had a stable upbringing. She attended one of the top public selective enrollment high schools in the city. Yet, though she had stability, she was still very conscientious about money. She knew her family depended on her to earn a degree and have greater success. Thus, her largest challenge in college, deciding on a degree program, was very much influenced by her desire to be financially successful for her family.

All five participants in the rising group also expressed challenges with the campus culture and climate. Each of them commented on how independent other college students at LUU were. Caroline, Demi, and Mia also noticed that the campus did not have as much pride or school spirit compared to their high schools or to other universities. Maria offered, “I don't know if it's the size or maybe it's just the environment of the school, but I definitely feel like there was more of a sense of community in, [high school]. I found my spot at [high school] the second week.” Furthermore, Caroline, Sky, and Demi were taken aback by how often many students partied. Overall, participants sought a more social, spirited, and academically focused environment. Throughout the semester, each of them tried to create an experience that met their expectations.

Summary. Ultimately, participants overcame significant barriers during their first semester and were moving in positive directions toward having a successful overall college experience. All five risers resembled participants in the struggling group during their first and second interviews as they struggled socially, felt pressed for time, or had trouble navigating their finances. However, by the end of the semester, they overcame challenges as they gained knowledge or developed social connections.

Success

All participants experienced some success during their transitions to college. For

example, they earned good grade point averages. However, upon closer inspection of how well they achieved their self-described goals, the struggling group did not achieve the same degree of success as the participants in the rising and soaring groups.

Struggling Group

Each participant in the struggling group either dropped or failed a class during their first semester and none of them earned more than 12 credits that counted toward their majors. Furthermore, Nancy was on probation for both the honors college and direct admission to nursing. After the fall semester concluded, Nancy shared that she was considering both transferring to another university and changing programs. This was shocking because Nancy was absolutely set on pursing nursing when she started college.

Jane was my only participant who did not participate in the final telephone interview. I initially was concerned that her financial aid issue prevented her from enrolling in courses for the spring semester as she likely would have owed money to LUU for fall semester tuition and housing. I eventually settled for looking at her Facebook page and found that she was speaking to a military recruiter. I also looked at the armed services website and found that they had changed their preexisting condition criteria in January 2017, which would have allowed Jane to enlist. Perhaps Jane decided to pursue her original career path. Thus, although Jane likely did not persist in higher education, she may be working toward success in the military.

I also examined how the participants changed. No participants in the struggling group stated that they changed during college. In fact, all of them stated that they felt the same as they did when they started college. Furthermore, they all seemed muted and withdrawn during their interviews at the end of the fall semester. Nancy started the semester cheerful, energized, and motivated to make friends. She ended the semester frustrated by her engagement on campus and

by her mother, who increasingly grew stricter throughout the semester. Nancy felt comforted by her sister's insights, that she probably would not make close friends until her junior year.

Oneyda was also was very subdued. Similar to Nancy, she described herself as loud, outgoing, and taking advantage of all opportunities during her first interview before the semester began. However, by the end of the first semester she was calm and ready for the semester to be done so she could visit her boyfriend in Mexico. Furthermore, Jane described many struggles throughout the semester. She started to open-up more during the last few weeks of the semester. Still, her financial aid award weighed on her.

Finally, my strugglers were also not in any classes directly related to their majors. Rather, they were enrolled in general education courses or prerequisites. Given that these three students were so focused on their majors at the onset, I wonder if they would have had more enjoyable experiences enrolling in courses that was related to their majors. This is not to say that the strugglers did not enjoy any of their courses. For example, Nancy's favorite course was chemistry; however, she never refers to learning anything new in this class.

Overall, no participants in the struggling group referred to learning, feeling like they belonged, changing, gaining confidence, meeting people from diverse backgrounds, or finding their friend group. Even Nancy, who made two friends who were in the same program as her, did not see herself as having friends. Since she only talked to them about classes, they did not serve as the social network that she hoped to form in college. Additionally, Jane knew friends from high school but even she did not develop relationships with them in ways that she had hoped.

Soaring Group

The soaring group, on the other hand, experienced many successes during their first

semester. All four participants in this group completed 12 or more of credits that counted toward their degrees. Even Anais, who dropped a Spanish class early on, still completed 15 credits. Furthermore, all four of participants were enrolled in at least one class directly related to their majors.

I also examined how they changed throughout the semester. They all stated that they had more confidence because of their experiences. Furthermore, they all referenced learning. Layla, Anais, and Madison shared that they were more open-minded and empathetic because of discussions and lessons within their classes. They also shared that their writing improved because of their English courses. Furthermore, Christina was excited to learn new math concepts, properties related to pH balances in her classes and how to build cars in her student organization for Latina/o engineering students.

All participants in the soaring group made friends and had strong social networks by the end of the semester. For example, Christina both maintained friends from high school and made new friends in her classes. Layla, Anais, and Madison also were excited to learn from people from diverse backgrounds in their classes. Finally, they all felt like they belonged at LUU.

Rising Group

Participants in the rising group had mixed outcomes which is reflective of their experiences described in the Transition section. They all made strong progress toward their degrees. Although two of the participants did not earn over 12 credits toward their degrees, those individuals were enrolled in math 90 and performed well in that course. Only one student from the rising group dropped a course. Mia dropped her math course. Furthermore, Mia was so stressed out about her math course that she decided to change her major from pre-med so that she would not have to take more math classes in the future. For Mia, this was not a difficult decision

since she was largely pursuing medical school to please her mother. Furthermore, dropping math may have also contributed to her developing more social connections. Before dropping the course, she spent most of her time studying for math quizzes.

Maria also ended the semester uncertain about her major. She did not find the clarity that she was hoping for and ended the semester considering many options. She hoped to hedge her options by pursing a degree in music, which is her passion, while also pursing another major in science or healthcare to ensure that she would have a financially stable career. Furthermore, during her fourth interview, after the end of the fall semester, she still was considering transferring to a different school to pursue a degree in music composition.

A few participants in the rising group shared that they gained new knowledge. These working-class women also shared that they had tremendous respect for their instructors and were eager to learn from them. Demi, Maria, and Mia said that they learned a lot for their courses during the semester. Their experiences resemble Steele's (2010) personal account of how a faculty member, who had high expectations, helped him feel valued at a university where he felt uncomfortable because he was Black in a predominantly White environment. Similarly, Berger and Milem (1999) suggested that faculty may play a critical role in the success of students who do not fit in or make friends since both faculty involvement and social integration correlated with persistence. Demi specifically learned about people from diverse backgrounds in her courses. Sky had an ethnically diverse friend group. Notably, all her friends were from working-class backgrounds. Caroline, although she did not recognize her learning, was starting to face issues related her ethnicity in the Asian cultural organization. Maria and Mia did not talk about interacting with people from diverse backgrounds or learning about people from diverse backgrounds in their courses.

Demi, Maria, and Sky expressed that they had changed as the semester went on. Maria and Sky expressed growing more comfortable with the campus environment and Demi felt more powerful and more like an adult. Furthermore, all participants except Sky expressed gaining more confidence. Because I did not specifically ask them about confidence, I am unable to conclude that Sky did not grow more confident.

All participants in the rising group initially struggled to make friends. Eventually Maria connected to people in choir, Demi talked to coworkers, and Caroline connected to peers in the Asian student organization. Mia also found friends but she still expressed that she was not quite satisfied and hoped to establish a stronger friend group. Ultimately, these four risers still sought closer connections. Sky was the only student from this group who found a close friend group toward the middle of the semester.

A few other participants also came close to achieving both a sense of belonging and gaining new knowledge. Demi and Maria did not gain a sense of belonging. Yet, Demi expressed that she felt like she belonged more in college than she did in high school. Additionally, Maria felt that, with time, she would feel like she belonged as she was slowly finding her way. Mia came close to achieving both a sense of belonging and new knowledge as she expressed that her writing skills were improving and she was starting to form friendships. However, she did not experience learning related to her career goals and she dropped a class. Furthermore, although she made friends, she expressed that she was still not quite satisfied in finding her friend group. Thus, she still did not achieve the level of success that students in the soaring group gained.

The two participants who said they felt like they belonged, Caroline and Sky, did not refer to gaining new knowledge. Furthermore, Caroline said she felt like she belonged but she

was still not immersed into the campus environment like she hoped to be.

Conclusion

Given that working-class students often have limitations with the time since they have jobs, commute, and, in some circumstances, spend more time studying, they likely have less time than wealthier students to establish friendships and develop a sense of belonging. As illustrated in each of the three groups above, working-class students respond positively to engaging classroom experiences and supportive instructors. Thus, I propose the best way to increase success for working-class students, beyond resolving financial concerns, is having a vibrant learning community that encourages group work, engaging discussions, courses within their majors, and opportunities to explore activities related to their career and social interests. Furthermore, students sought targeted opportunities for supplemental instruction, tutoring, and professors who have more office hours.

Regardless of if the student was in the struggling, rising, or soaring group, they all sought a more nurturing campus environment. As illustrated in this chapter, participants who experienced a more nurturing environment were more successful; whereas, participants who experienced a less nourishing environment were less successful. Furthermore, as the rising group has shown, students who initially face great challenges can also be successful with opportunities for meaningful learning and supportive social environments.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

In this study, I sought to understand the college transition experiences of Latina, Black, and White working-class female students. I focused my inquiry on working-class females because women are overrepresented among working-class college students but underrepresented among wealthy college students (Allen, 2011). Furthermore, they experience college differently from males with regards to fields of study, family responsibilities, discrimination, and safety among other factors (Allen, 2011; St. John, Hu, Simmons, & Musoba, 2001; Trusty, Robinson, Plata, & Ng, 2000). Furthermore, I sought to understand the experiences of students from different races and ethnicities since college students of historically underrepresented races and ethnicities are more likely to be of working-class (Douglas & Thomson, 2012; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2007). Thus, in this study, I examined the transitions from high school to college of Black, White, and Latina working-class female students to improve understanding of their experiences and to identify ways to increase their success.

I specifically focused on students' transitions to college because this period is particularly important to promoting success as many students do not persist after their first year in college (Tinto & Engle, 2006). Furthermore, the transition to college serves as a prime opportunity to understand characteristics of working-class students because students have not yet been socialized to the new environment.

Current strategies toward increasing student success largely ignore working-class challenges of limited finances and time, outside commitments, and campus climate (Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015; Walpole, 2003). Furthermore, working-class students' deficiencies are often highlighted while institutional structural factors are largely ignored (Museus et al., 2015;

Tierney, 1999). I began this study, therefore, with the premise that working-class Latina, Black, and White female students may have strengths that have been unrecognized or undervalued in higher education. Thus, to guide my inquiry, I posed the following four questions:

(1) How do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students experience the campus culture and climate at a large urban four-year public university?

(2) What do working-class Latina, Black, and White female students draw on to navigate the transition from high school to a large urban four-year public university?

(3) How do these factors (what students draw on and the campus culture and climate) influence their success during their first semester of college?

(4) What differences, if any, are there between the transition experiences of working-class female students based on race or ethnicity?

I applied principles of critical realism, the paradigm that guided my analysis of literature and approach toward research, to consider students' experiences and perspectives to understand their transition experiences. I used Schlossberg's transition model (Goodman, et al., 2006) to research components of students' transition experiences. I also incorporated Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth to emphasize students' assets and resources. Furthermore, I examined context, specifically focusing on the university culture and climate. These concepts establish the framework of the transition: the interaction of a person (college student) with an environment (university), and incorporates Schlossberg's 4-S System: self, situation, support, and strategies. Finally, to understand student success, I researched both institutional outcomes and student-defined outcomes.

I used a multiple case study approach where each participant was a unique case to portray diversity of transition experiences. Since I sought to understand a process—students' transitions

to college—I used a longitudinal design to collect data at multiple points during each participant's transition. I also identified a large, urban, four-year, public university with a relatively diverse student body as the location to conduct my study. After working with administrators at the institution, I was given permission to recruit participants via their Facebook class of 2020 page during the summer 2016, prior to the start of their first semester in college. I also worked with the precollege programs administrator to send targeted emails to entering first-year students. I recruited three Black, two White, and seven Latina working-class female students. I conducted a series of three face-to-face interviews to understand their transition experiences. I conducted the first set of interviews during the week prior to and through the first week of the semester, the second set of interviews during the fifth and six weeks of the semester, and the third set of interviews during the last week of the semester. After the fall semester concluded, I also conducted follow-up phone interviews to identify whether students persisted to the next semester and find out what grades they earned during the fall semester.

I created transcripts upon the conclusion of each round of interviews. During the data analysis process, I applied a critical realist lens to grasp the experiences, skills, knowledge, and resources of the participants. Upon the conclusion of the last round of interviews, I coded interviews according to my conceptual framework. For my first cycle of coding, I coded all interviews for each participant, before coding other participants' interviews, to develop thorough individual case analyses. During my second cycle of coding, I identified patterns across cases and incorporated them into an Excel spreadsheet that included all codes and quotes for all participants grouped by components of my conceptual framework. I also created concept maps for each participant that mapped their transition experience from prior to the beginning of the semester to their outcomes at the end of the semester. Finally, I reviewed codes to ensure I

identified negative cases and all codes within each group. Furthermore, I reread each series of transcripts to ensure I understood the context of the themes.

During the data analysis process, I explored how participants perceived success. I examined each participant's responses to the interview questions, "What does success look like for you?" and "What do you hope to gain from college?" From their responses, I identified patterns in how they defined success. From their definitions, I created key indicators of success. For example, many participants stated their goal was to earn a degree. Thus, to evaluate whether they made progress toward this goal, I looked at credits earned that counted toward degrees, semester grades, selection of major, and so on. I asked them about how they changed over the semester and some participants shared that they gained confidence. Thus, in addition to other measures of success, I included confidence because participants were empowered by it. Confidence is likely an enhancer of success.

I found that participants fit into three groups based on their degree of success. The first group, *struggling*, includes three participants, Jane, Oneyda, and Nancy, who did not achieve many indicators of success during the first semester. This group seemed to struggle from the onset. The second group, *rising*, initially struggled but overcame challenges to experience partial success by the end of the semester. This group includes five participants, Caroline, Sky, Mia, Maria, and Demi. The third group, *soaring*, started the semester strong and were successful in all indicators of success. This group includes four participants, Christina, Madison, Anais, and Layla. Five key findings emerged from the data that address my original research questions.

Findings

In this section, I share five findings that contribute new knowledge about working-class female students of different races and ethnicities experiences in college. Though participants'

unique experiences cannot be generalized beyond this study, my findings provide insights regarding how other Latina, Black, and White working-class female students may transition to college. Additionally, I recommend areas for future research to continue to identify how institutions can better meet the needs of working-class female students from different races and ethnicities. I also offer recommendations for practice to increase success of working-class female students.

Finding 1: Working-Class Students Draw on Their Working-class Cultural Wealth When They Transition to College.

Though participants had unique transition experiences, they exhibited many common characteristics. These characteristics emerged as assets that helped them navigate college. All participants, regardless of whether they were identified as struggling, rising, or soaring, demonstrated these characteristics. These shared characteristics are a key finding because, in much of the literature, working-class students are more often defined for their deficits (Museus et al., 2015; Tierney, 1999). I offer an alternative perspective that attempts to be unbound of cultural biases. Furthermore, this finding serves as empirical evidence to Walpole's (2007) suggestion that low-income students have assets and strengths.

Building on Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth for Latina/o students, I labeled the participants' assets as *working-class cultural wealth*. I described the assets as types of capital, including economical capital, aspirational capital, educational capital, hardworking capital, and empathetic capital. Together, these capitals highlight the assets that working-class female students of different races and ethnicities have when they begin college. I also describe working-class students' social capital, which includes their support network and resources.

Economical capital. I define economical capital as being resourceful with finances including living within one's means, saving money, identifying low-cost options, and avoiding situations that may cause financial distress. Though they lacked financial capital, participants demonstrated economical capital. Financial capital is money that one has available to use toward things that may build wealth such as starting a business, buying stocks, or continuing one's education.

Participants found cost effective ways to engage in college. For example, they searched for affordable text books, checked out text books from the library, attended campus events with free food, found the most affordable place to buy food on campus, lived at home to save money, saved their financial aid refunds, found employment that paid well, and lived frugally to avoid debt. A few of participants also paid monthly bills. Economical capital helped them avoid spending money on things that did not directly relate to their goals.

Economical capital also helped working-class students maximize opportunities. For example, while many participants hoped to attend highly selective universities, they also applied to more affordable local universities. Additionally, participants weighed whether to attend community colleges. They knew that university selectivity would be associated with future opportunities, but they also understood their own financial limitations. Thus, they instinctively performed cost-benefit analyses and decided to attend the institution with the most selectivity that was just within their threshold of affordability.

Critics may argue that working-class students' economical mindset is a deficiency rather than a capital because students are reluctant to take on debt and may make risk averse decisions (Hurst, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Such judgments are espoused in middle-class and upper-class values where risk is often perceived as positive as people encourage calculated risks for

potential financial gains. For example, in higher education, taking out loans may be perceived as a financial investment because students may have more earning power after they graduate. However, such investments are less risky for those with greater financial resources than for students from the working-class. Thus, whether one sees taking out loans as risky is a matter of perspective based on one's financial wealth. Furthermore, whether economical capital is an asset or deficit is largely a perspective shaped by privilege.

A critique grounded in privilege disregards the context of the participants' decisions. Economical capital can help working-class students navigate college as they have families who cannot offer them peace of mind with a financial safety net. The working-class women may not have attended college at all had they not had economical capital. Thus, I propose that participants thrive in college because of their economical capital.

Aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) has described aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). The working-class students who participated in this study maintained laser focus on their goals amidst challenges. For example, Oneyda's brother was incarcerated and Jane's father was in a coma from a car accident, yet they continued attending classes. Sky explained this unwavering focus stating, "You get to the point where everything gets to be routine and you just learn to move on and make the best of every situation." Her statement represents how participants handled challenges: they just kept going in the face of hardships.

Furthermore, Nancy, Maria, Oneyda, Mia thought they might not be able to pursue their desired majors. Rather than giving up, they strategized how to be successful. The working-class students' high aspirations may have been fostered by their hardships. For example, Demi shared that she was inspired to work harder to break the cycle of poverty. Demi, Layla, and Caroline

each practically raised themselves. Additionally, Mia struggled academically in sixth grade and had little support from her family members because they were preoccupied with other challenges. Mia took matters into her own hand to tutor herself, and she earned straight As in middle and high school.

Not only did I find that the working-class participants in my study had aspirational capital, but my findings also seem to contradict previous research that suggests working-class students have lower educational aspirations than middle and upper-class peers (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Terenzini et al., 2001; Giani, 2015). Though working-class students attend less selective institutions, quantitative studies have not directly examined working-class students' educational aspirations. My research suggests that working-class students may have high aspirations. All participants applied to highly selective institutions. Thus, I did not find a relationship between low social class and low educational aspirations in this study.

I did, however, find that participants' outcomes aligned with prior research that shows working-class students' have lower educational outcomes (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Lauff & Ingels, 2015; Mitchem & Mortenson, 2016; Walpole, 2007) because they encountered situations that hindered their aspirations, such as not being admitted to highly selective institutions or not having the financial capital to attend highly selective institutions. My findings suggest that working-class students may not have lower aspirations than other students; rather, they face more real barriers. Research that conflates students' lack of financial capital with lower educational aspirations perpetuates deficit mindsets about working-class students.

Still, more qualitative research is necessary to conclusively understand working-class students' educational aspirations as the participants in this study may not have been representative of most working-class students. The working-class students in this study were

high achieving, and only three participants enrolled in a developmental course. However, several studies found that working-class students had less academic preparation that middle and upper-class students (Hurst, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1994). Thus, participants' educational aspirations may not be representative of many working-class students because they had access to quality high school preparation. Nevertheless, their experiences still suggest that class alone is an insufficient—and perhaps misleading—indicator of aspirations.

Educational capital. I define educational capital as the ability to channel energy toward learning and education to improve one's life. For example, Anais shared,

> The biggest drive was that I wanted to be in a higher socioeconomic class than my mom was because I know she struggled a lot and it was hard to raise three kids and also be low-income. I was always like, "I have to get there. I have to go to college."

Though working-class participants in my study lacked financial capital, they compensated for this deficit with educational capital. Participants were deeply committed to their academic success. My research builds on findings by Terenzini et al. (1994) that first-generation students focused almost solely on academics.

The working-class women's educational capital served as a nexus to many aspects of their college experiences. For example, most participants made friends by studying together, attending the same classes, or having the same majors. Furthermore, they did not engage in student organizations with a social purpose; rather, they sought opportunities where they could learn about their identities or majors. Furthermore, Layla had transformational experiences regarding her racial identity development which she largely attributed to her class on slavery. A working-class Latina female participant in my pilot study, Liz, stated that she only sought to get

involved in activities that were purposeful. She said, “For me, being in an org. meant doing something, but the center was just social. I don’t want it to be senseless. It’s like you were forced to have friends.” She continued to explain why she preferred one organization, where she learned about community organizing, over the Latina/o social organization. Thus, their educational capital drove them to engage in activities related to their educational goals.

Furthermore, my working-class students may have had more educational capital than middle and upper-class students. A few participants noticed that other students were not as academically focused as they were. Nancy and Demi were frustrated that they could not find friends who had similar goals. Nancy quit a sorority because other members were not academically focused. Furthermore, participants commented about students who partied too much, did not study, or did not pay attention. Seven participants were also annoyed by classroom behaviors that did not respect the learning environment. For example, Caroline said,

> There’s this one kid in my English class and he doesn’t raise his hand, which is not that bad, but he speaks rude to the teacher. He’s always joking around in the back and whenever he is on his computer he doesn’t silent it so you can hear everything. I feel like you should have more respect for the teacher.

Overall, participants took academics seriously and hoped to be in an environment that supported their quests to learn. The only participant who did not fully equate academic performance with success was Jane, whose primary goal was to serve in the military. Yet, even she stated, “I feel like that’s the only thing that leads you to success, either going into the forces or going through education.” Thus, even Jane had deep commitment to education.

The participants’ accounts suggest that working-class students might be more focused on education than their middle and upper-class peers. This proposition warrants additional research

to further explore academic capital. Nonetheless, my research offers evidence to counter deficit perspectives of working-class students and highlight their academic commitment.

Hardworking capital. I define hardworking capital as the commitment of time and energy to achieve one's goals. Though I did not pose a question about hard work, ten participants brought it up spontaneously during their interviews. They either referred to themselves as hard workers or they explained that they need to work harder than others to be successful. Similarly, Walpole (2007) suggested that low-income students may be hard workers. A few of participants also shared that they were inspired by their parents' work ethic. For example, Anais shared,

> My mom has gone through a lot of stuff. When she was younger, growing up for her was like really, really bad. And she still managed to raise three kids and hold a job and get me to college and all that stuff, so I think hard work is a very big motivator for my mom.

Their work ethic also was evident through their actions. For example, Jane worked hard to learn math without course materials, Caroline worked 40 hours a week to ensure she could pay her bills, and Maria practiced music for countless hours. Additionally, during finals week, Madison only slept one to two hours a day for a week to study and write papers. Furthermore, Demi commuted up to four hours a day, worked 20 hours a week, took a full load of courses, and performed well in all her courses.

I also examined participants' perceptions about having to work harder than others. When I asked them about how their college experience was influenced by their race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, four participants specifically responded that they had to work harder than other students. Interestingly, more participants equated working harder to their race rather than their social class or gender. This may not be surprising since in the United States, people more often

describe inequity in terms of race rather than social class (Stuber, 2011; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2007). Nancy did speak to her social class as she shared an account of a conversation with her wealthier high school friends. She described,

> They depended on their parents for everything, for everything. They would ask me, "Why do you do this?" I'm like, "Well my mom's not going to give me money for that so I have to go to work." Like that's why. They're just like, "Well, why doesn't your parents just give you a debit card or credit card?" I'm like, "Well, how are they going to pay it off? They don't have money. That's why I have to do that." They're like, "Oh yeah."

Participants in this study perceived that others did not work as hard. For example, Demi stated, "I don't feel like I meet people in the same situations with the same goals and outlook on life. I meet a lot of lazy people here." Caroline shared similar sentiments, expressing, "I'm surprised that a lot of people party and don't do their work. I expected college to be very formal, but there's so many kids in my class who don't do their work, who don't care."

The concept of hardworking capital is supported by Harnois (2017), who examined national data from the General Social Study, and found that individuals of lower social class are more likely to believe they can get ahead via hard work rather than luck. Thus, when faced with a decision to work harder at something or to network with others, they may be more likely to work harder (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1994). Mia explained why she valued hard work. She said, "It's basically on your skills. You're not always able to make those connections. You should prove yourself with the abilities you have." Furthermore, six participants chose not to join student organizations to focus on academics. Their behaviors appear to be shaped by their commitment to hard work over acquiring social capital. Terenzini et al. (1994) also found

that first-generation students “appeared to be deferring involvement in the nonacademic activities and life of the campus until they felt they had their academic lives under control” (p. 64).

Furthermore, some working-class students have negative perceptions of building social capital, when building social capital is absent of hard work. For example, Mia offered an example of this when she described her high school. She stated,

> I didn't like that some of the students would kiss butt and they would get what they wanted. They would skip class to go to another class. They had the opportunity. Since they would get to skip class, they would also get to go outside for internships and all that. And because of that, they got scholarships that I couldn’t get.

Jack (2016) had similar findings in his qualitative study of 89 working-class undergraduate students who valued advancing through hard work rather than networking, even when they saw others getting more opportunities because of networking.

Furthermore, commitment to hard work may be related to gender. Singh, Kumra, and Vinnicombe (2002) found that women will more often than men reject networking and instead focus on their performance to get ahead in their careers.

Participants also worked hard to disprove societal biases that they were not worthy of being in a higher social class. For example, Demi stated,

> Although I went to a diverse high school, not a lot of teachers or just people in the school were actually rooting for me. I felt like they just didn't really care. They were just like, “Oh, you're here.” So, that kind of, just in a way, made me not want to try, but then I also thought about it. By not trying, I help to prove their point that I was not worth the time anyway, so that made me work harder to get recognized for my education and my

thoughts and stuff like that.

Thus, Demi focused on hard work, something she had control over, in an environment where she lacked social capital, to disprove others' assumptions about her. As illustrated in the earlier example, Mia also could have chosen to network with teachers to get internship and scholarship opportunities, but she chose to work hard instead. Furthermore, Jack's (2016) participants also chose not to network with others despite knowing that it would help them get ahead. Their commitment toward hard work seemed to also be a rejection dominant culture values. They all knew that networking worked, yet refrained from building relationships with others. Interestingly, they networked with others if they saw a purpose to their actions, such as asking for help on assignments. Thus, perhaps they did not reject networking altogether; rather, they rejected self-promoting networking. Additional research is warranted to further explore how working-class students' hardworking capital relates to students' modes of networking and acquiring social capital.

Empathetic capital. I define empathetic capital as the capacity to care for and empathize with others. This is similar to Yosso's (2005) definition of familial capital, which is the cultural knowledge and care for one's family as well as one's community. I broadened this concept of capital because I found that participants also had the capacity to care for and empathize with individuals who were not members of their family or community. My working-class participants entered college with the capacity to lead conversations that fostered greater understanding of challenges that affect different groups. In fact, many of them sought such conversations in college. For example, in her first interview before the semester started, Madison stated, "I'm looking forward to meeting new people. This university is very diverse and I'm very excited to learn about people's backgrounds, the traditions, just what they have to offer."

As illustrated in Table 6, 11 participants described caring for family members or caring for others as part of their definitions of success. For example, Christina, who pursued a degree in engineering, stated, “It would be nice to help other people. At one point, I considered being a teacher because my teachers helped me.” Arzy, Davies, and Harbour (2006) similarly found that low-income students aspired to give back to their communities. Maria is the only person who did not seek to help others. Maria, although working-class, grew up in a stable environment and had few, if any, major hardships. Thus, she may not have had negative experiences to motivate her to help others. Lim and DeSteno (2016) conducted two studies and found that experiences of hardship and adversity increases compassion. Furthermore, Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, and Keltner (2010) conducted four separate studies on social class and behavior and found that individuals with lower social class were more generous, charitable, trusting, and helpful that individuals from higher social classes.

Participants also were empathetic towards others during their transitions to college. For example, Anais empathized with her resident assistant (RA) stating,

> I think that a lot of times people don't really see the RA as a normal person. She's only a sophomore and I think a lot of people put her on this pedestal that she can do no wrong at any time. If she slips up or if she does something that they think is wrong, they are immediately attacking her.

Mia, who described herself as having anxiety, participated in class because she cared for the instructor. She stated, “I usually don’t participate but if I know the question, I might as well just answer it. I don’t want to leave my instructor or professor just standing up there and talking to themselves.” Additionally, many participants listened to their peers, offered advice, and supported them. Overall, participants helped create a positive climate in their spheres on campus

because they supported others.

Social capital. Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources. This capital is different from the above forms of capitals because it is comprised of resources that other people provide.

Though participants did not have a social network of college professors or administrators, business executives, or owners of large companies, they had social capital that helped them succeed their first semester. For example, Layla's grandmother lent her an I-pad. Caroline, Nancy, and Oneyda found jobs through their family, high school, and a college success program respectively. Furthermore, Oneyda's high school internship program also offered her an emergency grant and a mentor who helped her explore new majors. Also, Demi, Anais, Mia, and Layla relied on high school teachers for support during their transitions to college. Furthermore, Maria and Sky had siblings enrolled at Large Urban University [LUU], and Christina sought help from her aunt to complete the FAFSA. All participants had access to resources because of someone in their precollege environment. Additionally, most participants' high school friends also attended college. Bedsworth, Colby, and Doctor (2006) found that students were more likely to attend college if their peers intended to attend college. Although participants' resources may not seem as great as the resources available to many middle and upper-class students, they were essential to participants' success during their transitions to college.

These characteristics emerged as assets that helped them navigate college. Though participants have unique transition experiences, all participants demonstrated characteristics and had support networks that aligned with each capital. Furthermore, I tried to unbind their assets from middle and upper-class values. As such, I offered commentary and analyses regarding how their working-class cultural wealth may be misunderstood in contrast to middle and upper-class

cultures. For example, participants' may be perceived as risk averse rather than having strategic economical capital. Furthermore, hardworking capital could be perceived as un-strategic and absent of networking instead of as catalysts to building meaningful networks. Furthermore, educational capital could be perceived to limit social connections instead of as a link to social engagement with similarly educationally focused peers. Additionally, participants' aspirational capital contradicts previous research. My research suggests that although working-class students have lower educational outcomes, they still have high aspirations. These shared characteristics are a key finding because, in much of the literature, working-class students are more often defined for their deficits (Museus et al., 2015; Tierney, 1999).

Since all participants associated success with careers, I looked at the National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook 2016 to see how participants' wealth aligned with key attributes employers seek from applicants. I was surprised to find that participants' cultural wealth aligns with skills and traits that employers seek most among new professionals (National Association of College Employers, 2016). See Table 8 for comparisons. Hence, working-class students have characteristics associated with career success.

Table 8

Working-Class Cultural Wealth and NACE Attributes Employers Seek

Working-class cultural wealth	**NACE attributes employers seek on a candidate's resumes** (National Association of College Employers, 2016)
Hardworking capital	Strong work ethic
Aspirational capital	Leadership, Initiative
Empathetic capital	Interpersonal Skills, Communication skills
Educational capital	Analytic/quantitative skills, Problem-solving, Written communication skills
Economical capital	Problem-solving, Analytical/quantitative, Flexibility/adaptability
Social capital	Ability to work on a team, Interpersonal skills

All participants, regardless of whether they were identified as struggling, rising, or soaring, demonstrated these characteristics. Furthermore, their working-class cultural wealth

was enhanced in situations where they felt valued and supported.

Finding 2: Working-Class Students Thrive in a Nurturing Environment.

In this study, I sought to understand how working-class students experienced the campus culture and climate at a large urban four-year public university. All participants described aspects of the campus culture that reinforced autonomy and independence. As I examined how participants navigated the university environment, I found that they sought independence. However, they struggled when they did not feel valued, and they thrived when the environment was nurturing. My study supports Rendón's (1994) research on validation who found that "Success during the critical first year of college appears contingent upon whether students can get involved in institutional life on their own or whether external agents can validate students" (p. 8). Furthermore, I expand on Rendón's theory of validation, beyond external agents, to include the whole institutional environment. A nurturing institutional environment, inclusive of validating agents, supports working-class students' success. Furthermore, participants who experienced a more nurturing environment were more successful.

Independent culture. All participants spoke about the independent and autonomous culture of the university. For example, Demi stated, "I feel like more people are self-oriented in this school. They don't really depend on other people." The culture of independence was also reinforced in courses. Madison described, "No one is checking up on you, telling you to do your homework. No one is kind of nagging at you to study.... The teachers aren't really checking up on you." Furthermore, Sky perceived that the culture of independence permeated the university beyond the classroom, even amid the vast resources. She said, "They have these help, kind of like help lines and help organizations that can help you, but it's up to you to go to them and utilize them in whichever way that will benefit you the most." Thus, the onus is on the student to

seek support.

Navigating the university. Many participants were initially excited by their newfound independence. Furthermore, they understood that they were expected to function more independently. Sky stated, “It’s pretty straight-forward. You do everything on your own. You’re responsible.” However, shortly after the semester started, they faced challenges navigating the institution. For example, Jane described,

> I realized that I had to bring myself to this building just to get help, instead of emailing my teachers and they're like, okay, I'll come to you or we’ll go over this in class or this or that. I realized that that was a wake-up, when I had to keep coming to this building to get help. Help is not going to come to me.

Jane initiated asking for help but she did know who to ask. She was not careless or aloof; rather, she did not understand how to navigate the institution. She assumed that by reaching out for help, a response from the campus would be initiated. She did not know that she would have to go to a specific office to get help. Even when she did this, she could not figure out how to navigate the financial aid office as she only met with front desk staff, never an advisor. Jane’s experience is exemplary of many participants’’ accounts. Though they sought more independence, they struggled to execute it because they did not understand the university structure.

Independence and vulnerability. Furthermore, students in this study sought an environment that valued them as individuals. For example, Jane stated that she was reluctant to talk to professors because she felt like a number. Sky also did not seek help from professors who did not know her. In contrast, participants were comfortable asking for help from professors whom they felt knew them. Participants did not want their sole impression to be based on one

interaction where they were vulnerable asking for help. In order to disclose their struggles, they wanted others to know about their strengths and assets as well. For example, Demi was not truthful with a professor who asked her about her background. I asked her about why she did not share her background, and she stated,

> It's first impressions and I don't want his first impression of me to be like, "Oh, this girl, that's a troubled girl. She got problems with her family." You just don't want to give off a negative vibe about you. You want to seem like you're just like a normal person. Like, whatever normal means.

Her statement is illustrative of how participants sought to shield themselves from stereotypes or mistreatment from others. Students who felt vulnerable protected themselves. Thus, though participants sought independence, they also struggled to reach out for support without the assurance that others cared about them and recognized their strengths.

I recall having similar feelings to Demi when I was a college student and it has shaped how I work with students as a professional. To quickly establish trust with students, I make sure to ask students about their lives and backgrounds. Then I take leaps, guessing at what challenges they may have faced and what they might feel, and validate their experiences with authenticity and without pity. Students usually begin to talk more openly. I also let them know that I imagine they have experiences that they are not comfortable sharing, so they know I understand their guardedness. I sometimes share my own experiences or the experiences of people close to me to let them know they are not alone and that they can make it. I am honest with them about the magnitude of their challenges, but I also help them strategize. Finally, I let them know that I believe they will be successful.

Nurturing environment. Jane had another experience that is illustrative of how students

are influenced by a nurturing campus environment. During her first interview, prior to the start of the semester, Jane disclosed that she had severe social anxiety and was very shy. During her third interview, at the end of the semester, she shared an account of when she finally started interacting with other people on campus. She stated,

> A young man that goes here came to my room. I guess that's his job. He comes to different rooms. He came to my room and he asked me…. because I filled out this survey and it said fill out honestly, and I did. He was like, "So you just stay in here?" He just started talking to me.

Jane's engagement on campus was facilitated by a staff member asking her about her responses to a survey. This single action changed her behavior. After this conversation, she attended more activities.

Nurturing environment among peers. Students also found the campus to be nurturing through support from peers. Anais shared how she grew to rely more on peers. She described,

> My friend group started forming in the end of September, but we weren't great friends yet. It was like, could I tell them that I'm having a bad day and that kind of thing? I relied a lot on my high school friends at that point…. But that's gotten a lot better, just being able to talk to them and hang out and that kind of stuff.

Additionally, Anais's initial struggle to find friends was shared by all participants except Oneyda and Christina, who both entered college with many friends. Most participants found that the environment simply did not support opportunities for them to build substantial relationships because they did not see the same people often enough. They did not have courses daily, see students in multiple courses, or have opportunities to interact with peers in their courses. Furthermore, working-class students are less likely to live on campus and are more likely to

commute and work more hours. Thus, courses are key places for the working-class to build peer support.

Nurturing environment created by professors. Both Demi and Maria struggled to make friends, but they felt supported by their professors. They both felt that their professors cared for them as individuals and they gained knowledge from those professors. Layla also stated that she put more effort in her coursework when professors cared. I asked her if she would try as hard if the professors did not care about her writing. She replied, "If they're not even going to value what I'm writing either, I'm not going to give them my best either." Whether students found support from their peers or their professors, course experiences were of primary importance to these working-class students' success.

The benefits of a nurturing environment and drawbacks of a non-nurturing environment were most evident by comparing course structures.

Large lectures. Participants often did not perceive large lecture courses to be nurturing. In these courses, the onus was on students to adapt to the new course structures and facilitate their own learning beyond the classroom. Furthermore, these courses did not use student-centered teaching methods to foster engagement. Of the large courses, only the engineering class had group projects to facilitate interactive and peer-to-peer learning. In contrast to engineering, participants who took math and chemistry courses were surprised that lessons were taught using slides rather than more interactive methods such as working out problems on the board, working in groups, leading demonstrations, and conducting experiments. Most participants were used to learning math and chemistry in high school via more engaging teaching methods. Furthermore, students in this study sought more timely feedback from their assignments to support their continued learning. Though large lecture courses had discussion sections, the degree of support

they received largely depended on the skills of the teaching assistants. As described in Chapters IV and V, many teaching assistants were underprepared or too busy. Overall, participants complained about their math and chemistry professors or TAs as being brief, lacking availability, or not being invested in their learning.

Consequently, participants talked about getting through the course material so that they could get the grade that they needed. They did not discuss learning, understanding, or applying concepts. Thus, their engagement was low. Given the intense focus on expanding STEM careers in the United States and the challenges students have in completing STEM majors, the students' experiences suggest that great strides could be made simply by altering course structures.

Students also struggled to build peer relationships in large lecture classes. Oneyda commented, "You don't really know much of the people that are in your class. Sometimes when you want to study, you have to make friends in that class to study in a group; other than that, you're on your own." Participants simply did not interact with peers enough in math or chemistry courses to sustain friendships. Participants who did have friends in large lectures knew them from the residence halls, precollege programs, high schools, or other smaller classes.

Small discussions. Participants also experienced classes that were more engaging than their courses in high school. These classes were often smaller and included interactive teaching methods. Some students felt motivated because their ideas were validated during course discussions. For example, Demi shared,

> In high school, I would always be the person that disagrees with the whole class, so I always felt attacked. Now when I say these things, a lot of people are like, "Yeah, I agree." So, I'm just like, "That's nice!"

Demi's account shows that a university environment can both support autonomy, by supporting independent ideas, and be nurturing. These concepts need not be mutually exclusive.

This idea of having an autonomous and nurturing environment was critical when students felt most vulnerable. For example, after the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump, Anais described people experiencing great distress. She stated, "People were crying all over the campus and stuff, so it was a really wild experience. It was scary how scared everyone was." Yet she also said her professors were helpful. She explained, "A lot of my teachers, like my humanities teacher, has been very, very adamant about the fact that she wanted people to come to her if they felt unsafe over things like that." Many participants shared that their humanities and social science professors helped them put the election in perspective and feel safe and supported.

The 2016 presidential election cycle presented a unique opportunity to observe, on a large scale, how dialogues facilitated by faculty and staff about identity, free speech, and different ideologies help students feel supported. Though this semester was unique, as the election triggered fear from many people of disparate backgrounds, it also offered insights about how dialogue can be used to support students' success. This semester showed that universities must be prepared to respond to major events and engage in dialogues that challenge students' perspectives and supports students in achieving their goals. Isolated incidents of hate and prejudice occur constantly. Furthermore, many students experience micro-aggressions daily (Hughey, Rees, Goss, Robino, & Lesser, 2017). Higher education professionals can engage students in dialogue related to different identities and perspectives even in absence of a major corresponding event. My research suggests that dialogue can help students feel supported and learn from one another.

In this study, professors who led dialogues, facilitated discussions, and validated

students' perspectives were central to students feeling supported. Sky, in particular, shared that she only interacted with professors who she perceived as approachable. Furthermore, students who had more engaging professors and stronger social networks experienced more success. Those who did not experience nurturing environments struggled to develop relationships and experienced less success.

Support offices. Beyond the classroom, LUU had many resources and support offices for students to access. However, students often had to seek these resources on their own. Their instructors did not facilitate connecting them to other offices nor recommend that they visit specific offices, as they had experienced from teachers in high school. For example, Mia struggled for weeks to find tutoring for math. She eventually dropped this class. However, by the end of the semester, she discovered a science tutoring center, an honors college tutoring center that was open to all students, and a writing center. Perhaps if she would have known about these offices earlier in the semester, she may not have dropped her math class. Being in their first semester, participants in this study had not yet learned about or established connections to these resources.

Dominant culture values. The hands-off approach that participants described is likely constructed around a student population that had more resources. For example, students from wealthier families may rely more on their parents to pay for things and second and third generation college students may know more people who have gone to college who can help them navigate the transition. Thus, the independent culture of the university may be better suited to support the independence of students who enter college more comfortably reliant on others.

However, this approach does not appear to work for working-class students who may have faced challenges and hardships and likely already possess skills to be independent. Rather,

the participants in my study needed information, resources, and validation. When participants felt supported, they were more likely to seek support. For example, at the end of the semester, Jane shared that she opened up to a professor with whom she had a relationship after her father's car accident. She said,

> When I came back and I was able to talk to my teachers about the accident. And they told me that I should be able to reach out to all my professors to get everything that I needed. I feel that that's when I knew that I wasn't as alone as I thought I was.

In this study, students who were more successful experienced a more nurturing environment fostered by peer interactions and engagement than those who were less successful. However, engagement does not only include activities beyond the classroom; rather, engagement also includes course discussions and dialogues, supportive and nurturing spaces where students shared ideas, and learning experiences directly related to students' interests.

Outdated autonomy. It is quite possible that all students, not just working-class students, may struggle with the culture of independence. Over many decades, American colleges and universities have increasingly shifted toward greater bureaucracy, increasing class sizes, and greater reliance on technology (Thelin, 2011). Generations ago, students may have been more connected to one another by proximity. For example, students shared rooms, did not have technology in the residence halls, and attended courses that had fewer students (Thelin, 2011). Thus, it is likely that students had more opportunities to naturally establish support networks. Though college environments have changed, findings from this study suggest that the culture of autonomy still prevails. Additional research is necessary to better understand how the autonomous culture affects all college students.

Furthermore, universities increasingly admit more working-class students who may have even fewer opportunities to build support networks since they are more likely to live off campus or work more hours. Universities must figure out ways to create more nurturing campuses with more opportunities for engagement among students and professors to increase success of working-class students.

Tenants of a nurturing environment. A nurturing environment is where students feel supported and valued. Student-centered approaches are key to fostering a nurturing environment. I offer eight tenants, constructed on this study and my professional experience in higher education, on how faculty, staff, and administrators can foster a more nurturing environment. Faculty, staff, and administrators:

1. Engage with students with the mindset that students are capable and committed to success.
2. Appeal to students' interests in learning about themselves, others, and the world to facilitate their success.
3. Understand that students may not recognize when they need help or may face barriers that may hinder them from seeking help (Rendón, 2006). Thus, they proactively initiate contact with students.
4. Understand that students learn and gain validation from similarly focused peers. Thus, they actively help students expand their social networks.
5. Understand that the university is an unfamiliar complex structure and efforts should be taken to make navigating it easier so that students can focus on learning.
6. Are invested in helping students resolve challenges so that can continue making progress toward their goals.

7. Understand that students' disagreements or transgressions may be opportunities for them to learn, or symptoms of greater challenges for which they need support.
8. Understand that when students' safety or security is threatened, the environment is not nurturing. They must take swift but fair action to minimize harm.

Students in this study who were more successful gradually transitioned away from relying on their non-university support networks and increasingly relied on their university support networks. Furthermore, participants who were less successful during the first semester of college, the struggling group, maintained their reliance on their non-university support network. These participants experienced the least nurturing environment at LUU. Meanwhile, participants in the soaring group experienced the most nurturing environment. Thus, this finding suggests that nurturing environments support the success of working-class students.

Finding 3: Money is More Central to the College Experience than Participants Initially Anticipated.

When examining how the working-class students experienced the campus culture and climate, I found that my study supports previous literature that working-class students' success is associated with finances, time they spent commuting, and time spent at work, (Kezar et al., 2015; Walpole, 2007). Though all participants described challenges related to finances, participants in the soaring group, except Layla, seemed to have the fewest challenges associated with time. Though Layla worked a lot, she was the only participant who could study at work. Thus, her on-campus employment may have served as a buffer to challenges typically associated with students who work many hours—that they do not time to devote to educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). See Table 9 for a breakdown of students' finances and how they spend their time.

Table 9

Key Aspects of Transition Experiences

	Living environment	**Commute each way** (PT = public transportation)	**Job**	**Student orgs.**	**Prestigious scholarship**	**Financial aid refund**	**Loans**	**Tuition owed**
Struggling								
Jane	On campus			Part year		$1,000 refund[1]	X[1]	
Oneyda	Family	20 min. car	20 hrs.	Part year			X	$2,000 owed
Nancy	Family	45 min. PT	20-40 hrs.[2]	Part year		$1,000 refund	X	
Rising								
Caroline	Family	20 min. car	40 hrs.	X			X	$3,000 owed
Sky	On campus		4-20 hrs.[4]	X	X			
Mia	Family	45 min. PT			X	$2,000 refund	X	
Maria	Family	1 hr. PT	7-22 hrs.[3]				X	$500 owed
Demi	Family	2 hrs.	12 hrs.			$450 refund		
Soaring								
Christina	Family	1 hr. PT		X	X			
Madison	Family	1 hr. PT	15 hrs.	Part year	X			$400 owed
Anais	On campus			X	X	Small refund	X	
Layla	On campus		25 hrs.	X			X	$2,100 owed

1. Loans did not disburse
2. 1st job: 4 hrs./wk., 2nd job: 4 hrs./wk., 3rd job: 20 hrs./wk.
3. Seasonal job for 1 month
4. Steady hours all semester plus seasonal job for one month

Furthermore, my study contributes new knowledge about working-class students. Even working-class students who have financial resources may not see expenses associated with attending college as reasonable. For example, Caroline refused to spend money on food on campus. Even though she had money to pay down her loans, she would go entire days without eating on campus. Additionally, Mia would not spend money on campus though she had a $2,000 financial aid refund. Both students stated that items sold on campus were too expenses.

Overall, all participants found college to be more expensive than they anticipated. Some participants were shocked to find out how expensive books and materials for courses were. Even participants who were prepared to pay for books and supplies were surprised by everyday expenses. For example, Maria said,

> Mainly food. Because books, I already knew that was going to be a huge expense. I don't have time every day to make myself lunch so sometimes I have to buy food and every time I buy food on campus it's always at least five dollars and over the week that adds up.

Participants were surrounded by peers who had money to buy food daily, go downtown, shop, attend performances and events, and pay to be involved in Greek life or other student organizations. Participants did not anticipate these expenses and their transitions were affected by it. For example, Sky shared that she did not do anything during the first few weeks because students in her residence hall community always did things that cost money. However, she did attend events that offered free food. Layla did not join a sorority because she could not afford it. Demi only ate a fast food chain restaurant because it offered the most food for the lowest price. Moreover, Jane did not purchase course materials because they were too expensive.

Students knew that their resources were limited and, thus, tried not to spend money even if they had funds. Furthermore, Nancy, Demi, and Mia were not comfortable using their financial aid refund checks. They wanted to save the funds for future expenses such as summer school or for unanticipated expenses. Many participants also worried that they would not receive the same financial aid packages in future years, so they were already anticipating what they would do as they progressed through college. Meanwhile, Caroline and Maria tried to pay off their loans right away as they feared having debt. Many participants' decisions during their first semester of college were guided by their finances. Money affected where they attended school, where they lived, and how they participated in social or educationally purposeful activities.

Participants were also surprised by how much their job and living off campus affected their experiences. Students who sought to live on campus, but could not afford it, did not have

ideal college experiences. Some of them knew that living off campus would limit their engagement before the semester started. For example, Oneyda and Christina both shared that they were not expecting much because they lived at home. Others were shocked at how much living at home influenced their social connections. For example, Maria said, “Right now my biggest concern, my biggest issue with [LUU] is I feel like they cater more toward people who dorm here than anything else.” Even students who lived on campus found it harder to make friends with students who commuted. Additionally, participants who lived at home complained that activities were often too late in the evening to attend because of their long commutes.

Additionally, participants who had jobs had limited time to use resources on campus. Caroline talked about not having time to visit her professors, Maria and Madison stopped engaging in Bible studies when they started jobs, and Oneyda stopped interacting with her high school friends when she got a job. Thus, they all contributed less time than they anticipated on educationally purposeful activities.

Finding 4: Working-Class Students Sought to Engage in Dialogue about Diversity and Inclusivity.

Most participants, regardless of their backgrounds, were aware of their race or ethnicity during their first semester of college. Furthermore, participants of different races and ethnicities and precollege environments experienced college differently. Table 10 offers descriptions of their precollege environments. Their experiences, though disparate, showed that the working-class students were eager to engage in constructive dialogues about diversity.

Table 10

Participants' Precollege Environments, by Race & Ethnicity

	Neighborhood	High school
Latina		
Oneyda	Working-class, Latina/o, Urban	Latina/o Public
Nancy	Working-class, Latina/o, Urban	White Private Catholic
Mia	Working-class, Latina/o, Urban	Latina/o Public
Maria	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, Urban	Diverse Selective Public
Christina	Working-class, Latina/o, Urban	Latina/o Pubic
Madison	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, Urban	White, Female, Private Catholic
Anais	Working-class, Latina/o, Urban	Diverse Selective Public
Black		
Jane	Working-class, Black, Urban	Black Charter
Sky	Working-class, Black & Latina/o, Urban Middle-class, White, Urban	African/Immigrant, Non-profit Boarding
Demi	Poor, Black & Latina/o, Urban	Diverse Selective Public
White		
Caroline	Working-class, Latina/o & Polish, Urban	Diverse Selective Public
Layla	Working-class, White, Rural Working-class, Black & Latina/o, Urban	White Public Black Public

Though I could not thoroughly address my research question that sought to understand how working-class students from different races or ethnicities may have experienced college differently since I was only able to recruit a few Black and White participants for my study, I offer propositions for future research.

Diverse environment. Many participants were excited to attend an institution where so many different cultures and backgrounds were represented. Most students found the campus to be diverse. Layla, who is White, and Madison and Nancy, who are both Latina, were excited to attend an institution that was not predominantly White for the first time. Five participants, Caroline, who is White; Sky and Demi, who are Black; and Anais and Maria, who are Latina, attended diverse high schools or lived in diverse neighborhoods. They all found the campus to be diverse. A few participants commented that LUU was more diverse because more Middle

Eastern and Asian students attended. For example, Anais commented, “At my high school, there were no students who wore a hijab. There were absolutely none, but here there's a whole community of people who wear hijab so for me seeing them represented is really awesome to me.”

Not diverse enough. Four participants, Jane, who is Black, and Oneyda, Christina, and Mia, who are Latina, attended high schools and grew up in neighborhoods with people who were mostly of the same race or ethnicity as them. They all acknowledged that LUU had more representation of different groups but less representation of students from their race or ethnicity. Oneyda and Christina were not concerned about attending an institution with fewer Latina/os. Christina reasoned, “[LUU] is pretty diverse anyways. I mean my big thing was that my high school was like 99% Hispanic and then here it’s like I still see Hispanics.” They also both came to LUU with many friends from their high schools.

However, two students who previously attended predominantly Black and Latina/o high schools and lived in similarly represented neighborhoods found that LUU lacked diversity. Jane and Mia did not enter college with large friend groups and did not feel that there were enough students who had similar cultural backgrounds. Jane shared, “I went through a diversity shock when I first got here. Because, for some reason, even though we are in [the city], I thought there was going to be more people that look like me here then there really are.” Mia also offered,

> You’re not used to the different types of cultures. For example, I thought there was going to be a lot of Latinos but I really don’t see many Latinos. There’s a lot of, I don’t want to just specify, but Arabs and White people, I mean they’re really friendly and everything, but that aspect has changed because I’ve always gone to a Latino community school.

Additionally, participants felt that the culture of the university was different from what

they experienced in high school, but they could not quite explain how it affected them. For example, Jane stated, “I haven’t been around many Latino people, besides at [high school] there were like 20, but that’s like out of 400 and something students, or 500, so I just have to, I don’t feel like I have to adjust too much, I just have to learn to deal with…[pause]” Jane never finished her sentence. Additionally, Jane perceived that the university was 60% Latino when it was actually closer to 30%. She then discussed why having friends who were Black was important to her. She said, “I felt like they understand on a different level about certain things and that's just what I'm used to. It's the norm for me. I'm too trapped inside of the box of what I'm used to.” Mia initially shared similar sentiments but as the semester continued and she befriended others from her high school; she stated that she did not notice the campus diversity anymore. I suspect that, though LUU had more people from a variety of backgrounds, participants from predominantly Latina/o and Black precollege environments felt discomfort when they did not have a social network and the institutional culture was different from their precollege culture. Many researchers have also found that the dissonance between a student’s precollege culture and college culture negatively influences their transition experiences (Jack 2014, 2016; Locks et al., 2008; McCoy, 2014; Stuber, 2011).

Self-segregating students. The working-class women came to college seeking opportunities to engage with people from different nationalities, races, and ethnicities. Even participants who did not think the campus was diverse sought interactions with people from different backgrounds. For example, Jane commented, “Don’t be culture sensitive. Talk to everybody. I’ve seen people of the same ethnicity just group up. Like, you need to branch out.” Many participants expected that being in college would naturally lead to them engaging with people from diverse backgrounds. Yet, students quickly found that people often grouped by their

ethnic group. For example, Nancy stated,

> I just find it weird because at [LUU], you'll find all your Filipino kids stay together, and then you have all your Chinese kids and all the Middle Eastern kids stay together, and all the Mexican ones. You don't ever see them mix.

Some participants were insightful about why it was not easy to establish these relationships. Mia explained,

> I like that it's really diverse but sometimes I've notice that there is a certain group that won't talk to you right away, unless you interact with them multiple times. I guess because we come from high schools that are usually that specific race. Then just coming to college and just combining as one, I think it is a really big transition.

As Mia suggested, participants who did establish connections with people from different races or ethnicities spent a lot of time together as roommates, classmates, or coworkers. Furthermore, they were often of similar social class if they were not of the same race or ethnicity. Interestingly, I found that no participants thought the university was responsible for students grouping up by race or ethnicity. However, students likely would have benefitted from opportunities to engage in facilitated discussions with peers from different backgrounds.

Race and ethnic differences. Self-segregation may be partially attributable to cultural differences between students of different races and ethnicities. Students sought to be around others who validated their experiences, shared values, and had similar interests. I describe a few key similarities among students of similar races and ethnicities in the section below.

White students. My two participants who were White navigated the university with relative ease. Furthermore, they were similar in that they did not seem to feel out of place, other than fearing that others would perceive them as racist. For example, Caroline commented, "It

feels weird because I think that everyone assumes that just because I'm White that I voted for Trump. I'm like, 'No, I'm an immigrant, I would not vote for him.'" They largely sought the approval and acceptance of students from different races and ethnicities. Early in the semester Layla stated,

> At first I was kind of one of the only White people and now I think people are starting to respect me a lot more because I think they realize that I have more to bring to the table than just my race, I think.

White students were the largest race or ethnicity represented on campus. Yet, Layla felt underrepresented since she was used to living in an all-White community. Layla was open to learning from her peers, and as the semester went on she was less consumed with what others thought of her and more empathetic towards others' experiences. Layla perhaps gained the most from being in a diverse environment. Denson (2009) also found that White students benefited more from diverse environments than other groups. Meanwhile, Caroline maintained a colorblind ideology and did not seem interested in considering racial differences. She said, "I don't think those kinds of things affect the way I live my life, because even though I'm White, I'm still in an Asian club. I don't really see skin tone. Everyone's the same to me." Though she was not aware of her privilege, she demonstrated it quite clearly by stating she was not affected by race. Ultimately, participants who were White thought about race differently than participants who were Black and Latina. They seemed to have a perspective that they were absent of race and were outside observers.

Latina students. Three participants who were Latina, Oneyda, Christina, and Maria, did not think that their race or ethnicity affected their experiences. On the other hand, three Latina participants, Anais, Mia, and Nancy, faced challenges associated with their ethnicity.

Meanwhile, Madison, who was used to predominantly White environments, was excited to have Latina friends.

All seven Latina participants had strong family support networks that influenced their transition experiences. Arbona and Nora (2007) also found that working-class Latina/o families offered a lot of emotional support and encouragement, despite lacking knowledge about the college selection and application process. Notably, no participants from any race or ethnicity had parents who helped them navigate college. Five Latina participants, Madison, Mia, Oneyda, Nancy, and Christina, had mothers who did not work when they were growing up. Meanwhile, Maria and Anais both lived in duplexes with relatives. Thus, all my Latina participants were surrounded by family throughout their childhoods.

Furthermore, they either wanted to spend a lot of time with their families or were required to spend time with their families during the first semester of college. Even Anais, who lived on campus, visited her mother at work weekly and had her family visit her in the residence hall. The Latina participants all described their families as highly invested in their academic goals. Most of them had parents who were immigrants and believed that education would improve their lives. Thus, their parents actively supported their education in ways that they thought were beneficial, such as being strict, taking care of their daily needs, and making sacrifices so the students could have what they needed to be successful.

Four Latina participants either did not work or get involved in student organizations. All White and Black participants, except Jane, did both. Additional research on the transition experiences of Latina students could shed light on why they may be less likely to get involved. They may experience gender biases, as their male siblings often worked. They also may limit their participation to their coursework to ensure their academic success.

Furthermore, I compared the experiences of Latina participants to Black and White participants. All women in my study, except Demi, had supportive families who offered emotional support and encouragement. Furthermore, participants who were White and Black also believed that education would lead them to success; however, their families did not push them. They had more autonomy in their career goals. Whereas, six out of seven of the Latina/o participants felt pressure from their families.

Black students. All three Black participants grew up in different cultural environments as Sky attended a boarding school and had lived in neighborhoods of different social classes, Demi attended a diverse selective enrollment school, and Jane attended a predominantly Black public school. They all experienced some challenges related to their race in college.

Furthermore, they had cultural similarities. All three Black participants started college with a keen eye for recognizing inauthenticity, structural barriers, and hypocrisy. For example, Jane said, "I feel like they don't know what they want to prioritize. I feel like the system, the way it's set up, it's not set up for everybody to succeed." She commented that her high school was so focused on structure and discipline that students did not develop skills to be independent. Furthermore, Sky noticed that people became less compassionate as they gained more power in her school. She said,

> The consultants always seem like they saw every kid as a bad kid, and that's not something you should do in that kind of position, I feel like. And that was always something that really bothered me. The funny thing is that all the consultants have, at one point, been the family teacher. It's funny because one had recently been promoted, and I had interacted with him before he became a consultant and he was way different. I guess that comes with the authority of it.

Additionally, Demi noticed that teachers in her high school talked about challenges in other communities but failed to recognize similar issues in their own school. She said,

> I took an ethnic studies class, and we discussed how, in other schools, the kids didn't have books and stuff, and they came from a low-income family and they couldn't afford uniforms and stuff like that. I'm like, the same things happen at [this school], because I'm a student and I can't afford really anything so I couldn't participate in things. To be on the sports teams, you have to pay for it. I couldn't pay for it so I couldn't be on sports teams. When we talked about things, it made me mad because it's like, you can be aware of this happening at another school, but you overlook the things that happen in your school. A lot of teachers do that.

All participants who were Black entered college with these insights. No other participants expressed such insights during any of their interviews.

My research also suggests that Black students may have greater analytical skills and interpersonal skills regarding identifying structural barriers, hypocrisy, and authenticity in others. I speculate that participants who were Black may have had cultural experiences where people were more comfortable confronting others when their actions were incongruent with their words. Furthermore, they may have had more direct communication patterns. My research builds on Carter's (2003) theory of Black cultural capital which proposed *Black authenticity* as speaking in ways that are authentically Black with more direct communication methods. Similarly, I attended predominantly Black high schools, and, when I came to college, felt like I used a more direct communication approach. I also felt like I could detect inauthenticity and hypocrisy. I attribute this to attending a high school where students experienced injustices and were comfortable speaking their minds. Additional research could explore this proposition further.

Campus subcultures. Five participants were connected to cultural centers. Interestingly, participants did not talk much about their experiences with cultural centers. Jane and Demi both had mentors in the African American cultural center and Maria, Mia, and Christina were connected to the Latina/o cultural center. Specifically, Christina studied at the Latina/o cultural center. Though each participant shared that they were connected to these units or had a meeting with an advisor, they did not say were close to the advisors nor did they describe events that were integral to their experiences. Perhaps they were not yet well-connected to these units since they were only in their first semester of college.

In contrast, seven participants joined student organizations on campus and felt very connected to them. Anais joined a Latina/o student organization and an LGBT student organization, Sky joined an African student organization, Christina joined an engineering Latina/o student organization, Caroline joined an Asian student organization, and Oneyda and Madison participated in Bible studies. Though Oneyda and Madison eventually quit the Bible studies, they were both initially invested in them. Layla also joined a women's online magazine. Though she learned a lot by conducting research, she did not gain a support network since they only engaged online. I found it interesting that participants only joined organizations that fostered learning related to specific identities. Jane and Nancy did join groups unrelated to their identities, Frisbee and a sorority respectively, but they both quit those organizations. Arguably, the sorority could be seen as supporting women; however, Nancy did not seek to discuss learning or issues related to women in this organization so I did not include it as such.

Nancy specifically avoided organizations related to her Latina/o identity because she was more comfortable around people who were of different races and ethnicities. Thus, in this respect, she was similar to other Latina and Black students who joined cultural student

organizations as they all sought out groups with whom they were comfortable. Unfortunately, Nancy slowly began to discover during the semester that her precollege environment was not very supportive of her identity either. Furthermore, in college, she never quite figured out where she fit.

Caroline, who is White, also participated in an organization related to an identity to which she did not belong. She participated in an Asian student organization because she thought it would be fun. During her interview, she did not consider why students who were Asian may have joined the organization. Rather, she was initially worried about being accepted as she was the only White student in the group. Though she felt her ethnicity, she did not seem to recognize her privilege in the organization. For Asian members, the organization was quite possibly the only place where they did not feel theirs. Though Caroline made friends in the organization during the semester, she missed opportunities to learn from her peers as she did not engage in conversations related to race or ethnicity when other students asked her about why she joined. Her experience illustrates how White students can choose to avoid or engage in issues related to race and ethnicity even in diverse environments. The student organization was foreign for Caroline; whereas, it was a support network for Asian students.

Based on their involvement and how they described their experiences within the organizations, I found that students of color gained comfort and learning in organizations with greater representation of individuals who share their backgrounds. In contrast, White students did not find comfort, but did have opportunities to learn from diverse racial environments.

More opportunities for learning. Many participants generally found the campus open and supportive. However, all participants described incidents related to race or ethnicity.

A few students commented about peers who were afraid to go to certain places in the

city. For example, Sky shared,

> Sometimes you'll just overhear somebody saying something…. [My friend] was like, "The girl who was next to us, who was Caucasian, was like, 'Yeah and I was volunteering in this really bad area and all these Black people were staring at me and I was so scared to walk next to them but I was like, oh my gosh, I'm going to die today'" and blah blah blah. Those kinds of assumptions are frustrating, because it's like, how do you expect people of color to not to dislike you when you immediately assume that they're trying to hurt you? Nine times out ten they don't really care what you're doing, they just trying to survive and get about their day without getting killed by one of their own.

Participants who grew up in predominantly Black or Latina/o communities were disheartened when other students made assumptions with seemingly little regard for their struggles or personal experiences. Layla initially fit this image as she spoke openly about being afraid to use public transportation or visit diverse neighborhoods off campus. However, by the end of the semester, she used public transportation on her own. Her transition may be attributable to having more experiences with people from different backgrounds and critical conversations about privilege and oppression.

Many students also referenced incidents of racism before or after the 2016 presidential election. Some incidents were overt and direct. For example, Jane described an experience off-campus. She said, "When we were downtown, because that's where her school is…and somebody thought it was okay to say the N-word too. It got real hectic. It was like, this was right after the election. I feel like they were…" Jane stopped mid-sentence, so I asked her follow up questions. She continued,

> If I reacted, it wouldn't have been good so I just kept walking because he bumped into me. I'm sure he did it on purpose. I tried to kind of, you know when you move out of the way some, and all he had to do was move out of the way some, so you don't come in contact with that person. He bumped into me on purpose. My skin was boiling in that moment, that's why I continued to walk because my reaction would not have been good. I probably would've sprayed him. I have mace in my purse at all times. I felt kind of threatened at that point. That's why I walked briskly past him.

Jane was the only participant who shared that she was the victim of an overt racist incident. However, many participants referenced the Class of 2020 Facebook page as a place where students attacked one another with extreme views and hateful messages. Since only LUU students had access to the private group, students felt the national tension of the 2016 election within their campus community. For example, when I asked Anais if she was still experiencing what she referred to as culture shock, she stated,

> I think it's less physically then just seeing things. Like things aren't happening to me, you know the kind of thing. But, we have a Class of 2020 Facebook group that a lot of stuff happens, especially around the presidential election cycle. It was for days leading up to and after the election. There was a lot of people in political debates and they were saying really, really messed up things to each other, really horrible things.

Unfortunately, this page did not allow for constructive dialogue and, instead, made people feel more disconnected from their peers.

I also suspect that participants who were Black and Latina faced subtler forms of discrimination. Nancy, who is Latina and Jane and Demi who are Black, struggled to make friends during the semester. They both shared experiences of when they tried to initiate

friendships but were rejected or ignored. Some might argue that they may have behaviors that were off-putting. However, Layla, who is White, was perhaps the most outspoken and even made insensitive statements about different groups throughout the semester; yet, she made many friends of different races and ethnicities. Thus, I suspect there was more subconscious racial biases influencing the Black and Latina participants. Furthermore, Anais, who is Latina, had friends who told her that they initially were afraid to talk to her because she looked unapproachable. I cannot help but wonder if participants struggled to make friends because of their race or ethnicity. Carter, White, and Sedlacek (1985) and Livingston and Stewart (1987) found that White students have more negative perceptions of Black students. Though these studies were conducted over 30 years ago, my research suggests that the issue is relevant to students in 2016. Furthermore, Onwuachi-Willing (2012) has conducted research with faculty women of color and found that they were more likely than other faculty members to be perceived as unapproachable. Such stereotypes may also exist for female students of color.

Summary. All participants, regardless of whether they were Latina, Black, or White, sought to be understood as individuals and not stereotyped for their appearances. They sought environments supportive of their identities. A few of participants were frustrated by misconceptions and lack of dialogue about race and ethnicity. Thus, I believe university administrators can build upon their skills and interests to engage the entire campus community in more intentional discussions about social justice and diversity. Not only would the students in this study have the skills to engage in constructive dialogues, but they would also build relationships with people from different backgrounds. Most importantly, many participants sought to learn from individuals from different cultures. Thus, universities would be supporting a student-defined outcome.

Finding 5: Gender Differences are Pervasive to Their Experiences, but are Often Unnoticed or Invisible to Participants.

Throughout the interviews, participants did not share experiences when they noticed their gender except when I asked them about it. In contrast, most participants brought up experiences regarding their race or ethnicity without prompting. When I asked participants about how their experiences were affected by their gender, many participants paused as if they had not thought about it. After the initial pause, a few patterns emerged with their responses.

Caroline, Maria, Madison, and Anais shared that their experiences were not influenced by their gender. Jane and Nancy found it easier to make friends with men instead of women. For example, Nancy said,

> It's easier for me to talk to guys because guys don't care. They don't care. They'll talk to anyone. They'll be like, yeah. Whereas girls, I feel like they're just more picky about who they want to talk to and I'm just like, why? Why? You don't have to have an inner circle. College is different. Like, get over it. It's not high school anymore.

Layla initially felt it was easier to be friends with guys too but, by the end of the semester, she changed. In her third interview, she stated,

> When I was at home, I was best friends with seven guys and one girl. I don't know. I guess I was kind of okay with guys belittling me because I thought that was normal when I was growing up. Here I'm like, "You don't talk to women like that!" That has definitely changed a lot.

Oneyda also discussed experiences with gender before she came to college. She shared that she read an article about girls not being exposed to math growing up, and she attributed this to why she struggled with math in college.

Sky, Mia, Demi, Christina, Oneyda, and Layla noticed gender differences in their STEM courses and political sciences courses with men being more comfortable speaking up in classes. Mia attributed the difference to confidence. She said, “Yeah I notice that a lot of them, usually technology and the sciences, I guess guys feel a lot more confident than girls. I just think it’s the confidence to participate in class.” However, the other participants did not see their own behavior as deficient. Layla explained,

> The girls just kind of sit there and they listen. I've kind of always been like that. I don't think there's anything wrong with sitting there and listening, but then I feel like people undervalue when someone does speak. I've noticed. I'm a people watcher.

Layla’s account is an example of what Belenky et al. (1986) refers to as received knowledge, which is one of the five women’s ways of knowing. Furthermore, Patton et al. (2016) described this as a common trait of first-year college students since they are used to listening to authority figures in high school. Demi, however, offered another reasons why women may be less likely to talk in class. She said,

> Not all of my classes, only in probably in chem., the professor, he only calls on people who are dudes. I've never actually noticed him to call on a girl for a question or answer or anything like that. Being ignored.

Participants have attributed gender differences with engagement in STEM course to confidence, communication differences, and professors’ biases.

Furthermore, participants were annoyed with behaviors by males in their courses. Sky bluntly stated, “Some of the guys are, you know cocky, arrogant, and whatnot.” Christina also vented about a student who was confident without the knowledge to warrant such confidence. She stated,

> It's just this one kid in my chemistry class, I guess he's taken AP chemistry in high school. He thinks he knows all the things, and he'll answer something and I'm like, "Where did you even get this from?" because he is wrong! I'm like, "How do you get this?" Like today, they asked him—well they didn't ask him—but they're like, "Is water ionic or molecular?" and he's like, "Is it polar?" I'm like, "Where'd you get polar from? Why?" It makes me mad. Then they'll be like, "Here's a question, but this one kid, don't answer it." And he's like, "I could answer it though." And they're like "okay, answer it," and he gets it wrong.

Additionally, Caroline, even though she did not recognize it as a gender issue, described having a male student challenge her English professor. She stated,

> There's this one kid in my English class and he doesn't raise his hand, which is not that bad, but he speaks rude to the teacher. He's always joking around in the back and whenever. He is on his computer. He doesn't silent it. You can hear everything. I feel like you should have more respect for the teacher.

Notably, both Christina and Caroline's professors were women. Additionally, Christina shared an account of a male student telling her to vacuum while the males continued to work on the group project for an engineering course. Christina said that such incidents would not affect her. However, in her group, she would sit around and write the paper while the male students worked on the projects. In four years, I imagine the lack of hands on experience will have a cumulative effect on her learning outcomes compared to her male peers.

Many of the incidents occurred in STEM areas, where women were not represented as much as in humanities and social sciences courses. Interestingly, of the six students who started out pursuing STEM majors, two students had changed majors by the end of the semester to avoid

STEM courses and one was considering it. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, math and chemistry courses did not foster a nurturing environment. It appeared that the university recognized this challenge because Caroline, Oneyda, and Christina were connected to a campus office with the specific goal to foster the success of women in STEM fields before the semester began. Though they received support from a women engineering organization, it was not central to their experience. No women sought this office for support during the semester. I find it interesting that campus resources were dedicated to this programmatic office rather than directly improving teaching methods, reducing course sizes, or investing in more tutors or supplemental instruction. Perhaps this program is more effective later in students' collegiate experience. Additional research is necessary to understand if and how student success may be enhanced by such support offices.

Gender influenced the participants' transition experiences in ways they did not recognize. For example, participants talked about carrying mace, fearing walking alone at night, and fearing sexual assaults. Layla also discussed whether she and her friends were dressed "appropriately" when they had a scary encounter using public transportation. A few participants were dismissive of male friends' aggressiveness or changed behaviors after joining predominantly male organizations such as ROTC or fraternities.

Some students even spoke negatively about female friends and other peers without realizing that they were perpetuating stereotypes against themselves. For example, when Layla described her cluster-mates she said, "Girls are gross! Messy!" Participants likely experienced gender differences their whole lives, but because they were so pervasive and seamlessly integrated into their lives, they did not notice them. For example, many participants described having brothers who were unmotivated, selfish, or delinquent. In contrast, participants were

determined, focused, and empathetic. Yet, no participants felt that they were treated differently from their brothers because of their gender.

Many participants wanted to believe that they were not influenced by their gender, even if they described negative experiences related to gender. I recall wanting to do this myself when I was younger. I knew of gender biases in high school and college, but I thought I was talented enough and that the world was changing enough that I would not be affected by them. It was not until I was exposed to environments that were dominated by men that I feel the weight of my gender. Participants may have strength in numbers right now, but I anticipate that their perceptions will shift over time. This is already evident in STEM courses where participants had identified challenges during their first semester. Their gender had likely influenced their success already. Although gender was not at the forefront of their minds, working-class women of different races and ethnicities in my study had gendered experiences in college.

Summary

This study was particularly illuminating because participants had many strengths that helped them complete their first semester of college; yet, working-class students are often described for their deficiencies. By incorporating Schlossberg's Transition Model into the conceptual framework, I separated students' situations from their individual characteristics and I learned that working-class students have attributes that closely align with the educational mission of higher education. I labeled these attributes *working-class cultural wealth*, to acknowledge the strength they gained and support they have from their precollege environments, which are often unrecognized in practice and in higher education literature. Findings of this study suggest that faculty, staff, and administrators should recognize working-class students for their cultural wealth. Findings also suggest that institutions can increase students' success through greater

alignment with their educational mission. Thus, faculty, staff, and administrators should identify ways to create an environment that fosters working-class students' success.

One aspect of the institutional environment that was important to the participants was a racially and ethnically diverse campus. Participants in this study largely found LUU, a racially and ethnically diverse university, to be friendly, open, and supportive. Based on Latina and Black participants' accounts of friends who attended predominantly White campuses and struggled with the lack of diversity, participants likely experienced a more inclusive campus environment than students at campuses with less racial and ethnic diversity. The campus climate also served as a strong counterbalance to the hostile national climate associated with the 2016 presidential election and protests. Though students described incidents related to their race, class, and gender, they also described support from their humanities instructors, campus subcultures, and peers. As illustrated in Chapter V, participants who had more support on campus also experienced more success during their first semester.

Yet, at the same time, the deeply embedded culture of autonomy as well as the cost of attendance were negative aspects of the participants' experiences. The working-class women thrived in high school but struggled to adjust to having less support from instructors and fewer opportunities to engage with peers. In courses where participants had the least success, professors were detached, unavailable, and did not use methods to facilitate active engagement among students. Furthermore, sometimes the culture of autonomy without support was harmful. For example, if Jane's financial aid never disbursed, she likely would have owed the entire cost of tuition and housing to the university. Thus, she would have been worse off financially than before she started college. Thus, practitioner outreach to students not only enhances students' success, but it is also essential.

Meanwhile students who experienced a more nurturing environment that fostered their intellectual curiosity, such as engaging in dialogues with peers and faculty, met may of the outcomes they set out to achieve during their first semester of college. Students also thrived when barriers related to finances were reduced through gaining access to technology, finding stable employment, or receiving emergency grants. These are all ways that institutions can better support success of working-class students.

All participants in this study had working-class cultural wealth. However, the degree that the campus was a nurturing, supportive, and affordable for each student largely affected their degree of success during the first semester. Even though participants experienced varying degrees of success, they all experienced some success as they persisted and continued to work toward their goals despite challenges. Yet, many participants will likely face more challenges in future semesters. I hope that they continue to thrive, but I worry that, at some point, their capital may not be enough for them to continue to overcome so many barriers. I call upon higher education practitioners to shift their environment and perspectives to better nurture students' working-class cultural wealth to increase working-class students' success.

Working-class Student Transition Model

This study yielded five findings related to the experiences of working-class female students' transition experiences. With new understanding, I revisited my conceptual framework to reflect the findings in this study. I developed the Working-class Student Transition Model shown in Figure 5 to serve as a road map for researchers and practitioners to understand the transition experiences of working-class female students to improve student outcomes. This model follows the format of Astin's I-E-O model (1984/1999) and draws from Schlossberg's transition model (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006) and Yosso's (2005) concept of

community cultural wealth.

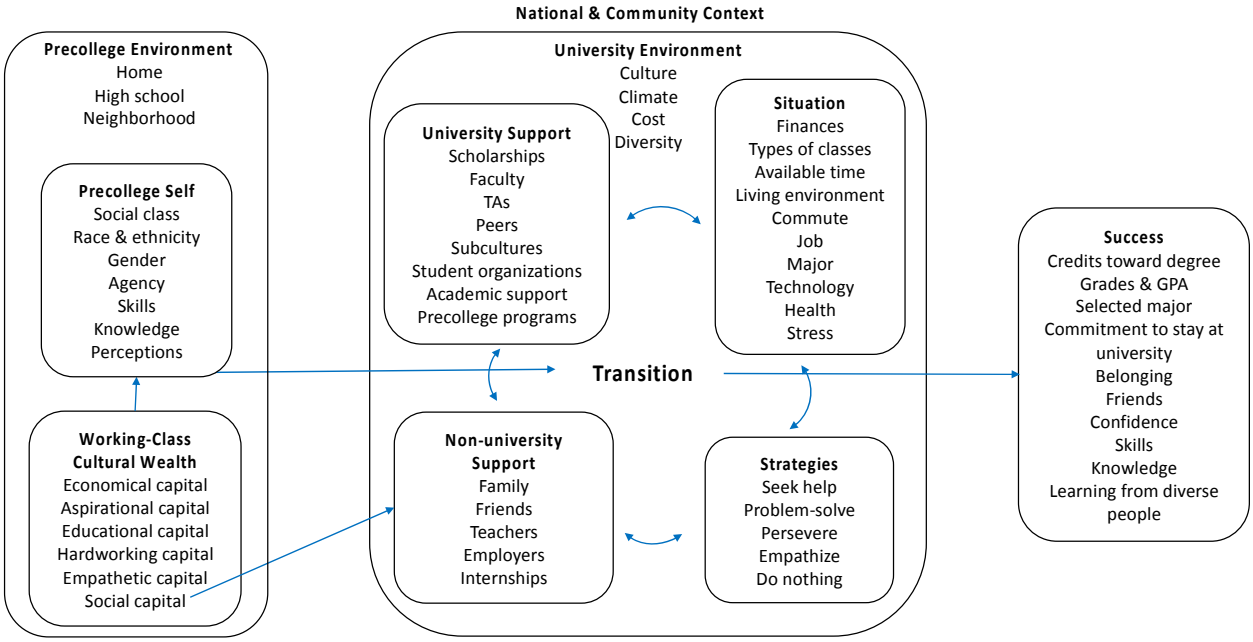

Figure 5. Working-class Student Transition Model

Schlossberg's transition model provides structure to understanding the transition process. It includes four factors, *self*, *situation*, *strategies*, and *support*, which separate situational factors from an individuals' characteristics. In this model, the ease of the transition can be thought of as the ratio of assets and resources to liabilities and deficits of the 4 Ss. To improve success for working-class students, practitioners and researchers have focused on reducing students' liabilities and deficiencies. This strategy is essentially a deficit approach. Another strategy is to change structures so that students' assets are valued and resources are recognized and maximized. Yosso's (2005) concept, *community cultural wealth*, which she described as "the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged," inspired me to identify and incorporate working-class cultural wealth into the Working-class Student Transition Model (p. 69).

With these theories explained, I return to Astin's I-E-O model to describe the Working-

class Student Transition Model. The *input* includes student's *precollege self*. The precollege self is comprised of attributes that shape their behaviors in college and influence their experiences in college. The precollege self includes what they have learned in their precollege environments, which includes their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. These environments also have cultures that shape students' working-class cultural wealth. When students enter college, they use working-class cultural wealth to navigate new experiences within the new environment.

The *experience* is organized by Schlossberg's 4 S System. I showed in Chapters V and VI that all working-class students in this study used working-class cultural wealth during their transitions to college. Their first semester success was largely determined by the ratio of assets and support to deficits and liabilities. In the Working-class Student Transition Model, students who do not receive a lot of support and have few assets, such as time or money, may still succeed because of their self, including their knowledge and skills, and the strategies they use to help them navigate the transition. Nonetheless, this study shows that working-class female students who achieved the most success found the campus environment to be nurturing with support from individuals such as teachers and peers and situations that supported their learning and did not cause more financial burden.

Also, the Working-class Student Transition Model includes factors beyond the university environment—the national and community context—that may affect students' transition. For example, in this study, participants shared accounts of how racial incidents in the community and the national political climate affected their college experiences. Researchers and practitioners that sought to increase success of working-class students' might also identify means to help students understand and navigate issues related to contexts beyond the university.

Finally, *outcome*s are based on working-class students' measures of success. In a non-deficit model, student-described outcomes are significant since institutionally-defined outcomes are ascribed in the majority culture. Few studies have explored student-defined outcomes (Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

The Working-class Student Transition Model separates students' characteristics from their situations to draw researchers and practitioners away from perceptions that working-class students are deficient. This model also shows that working-class students have cultural wealth, which aligns with the educational mission of higher education. It highlights that working-class students may have assets to support their success. Furthermore, I encourage researchers and practitioners to identify ways to enhance the university environment to nurture working-class students' cultural wealth to foster their success. The model includes aspects of the situation and university support that can affect students' success. I also encourage researchers and practitioners to specifically focus on these factors to increase working-class students' success.

Limitations

Though my findings offered many insights and propositions that warrant further exploration, my study had limitations that must be taken into consideration. With only 12 participants, I was limited with what conclusions I could draw about female working-class students at LUU. Furthermore, I did not recruit as many White and Black participants as I had hoped. Thus, I was unable to draw theoretical conclusions about how race and ethnicity influences working-class female students' transition experiences. However, I hope my study drives future research to explore my propositions further.

Furthermore, I did not consider the experiences of Native American students, Asian students, and students of other underrepresented races and ethnicities. Museus and Neville

(2012) have specifically looked at the college experiences of Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese students and found that they have some of the lowest levels of success, as measured by graduation rates, than any other ethnic groups. I also did not interview any undocumented students, who often have even greater financial barriers, fewer access to resources than permanent residents and citizens, and stress related to deportation. Thus, additional research on the experiences and perceptions of working-classes students from other cultures and backgrounds is warranted to understand inequities related to culture and social class within the university context.

Another limitation is that many participants had substantial scholarships and grants during their first semester, attended selective enrollment high schools, and/or achieved high ACT scores. Thus, participants may not be representative of most working-class students. At the same time, the participants serve as strong cases to understand cultural wealth because some of them, though they grew up with great hardships, did not have as many liabilities related to academic preparation and finances that is often discussed in the literature (Carter et al., 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Walpole, 2007).

My study only takes place over the course of one semester, whereas most researchers in higher education suggest that the transition experience spans the entire first year of college. Thus, to fully capture students' transition experiences, as defined in the literature, my study warrants being extended to include participants' second semester experiences. Furthermore, follow-up interviews should be conducted throughout participants' entire undergraduate experience to gain a more thorough understanding of how institutional and student factors influence participants' success.

I also was limited in that I was not able to conduct a fourth interview with Jane. I could have gleaned much information from her about why she left the university during her final interview. Instead, I could only make inferences about why she may have left the university. Her Facebook page suggested that she was pursuing a career in the military. However, I have no way of knowing with certainty. She also may have not been able to resolve challenges with getting financial aid. I hoped to talk to her to understand if she was able to work with the university to resolve the financial aid issue. This issue has huge implications for students' success. Her experience could inform future research and practical recommendations regarding financial aid policies and practices.

Another limitation to my study is that it took place during the 2016 presidential election cycle. Though much can be learned about how support from faculty and staff can help students learn and feel connected when students are faced with hateful rhetoric and incidents, the magnitude and pervasiveness of these issues were unique to 2016. Polarized views dominated social media as illustrated by participants in this study avoiding their Class of 2020 Facebook page. Many people were affected by the rhetoric of 2016. Thus, my findings are unable to be generalized to other contexts. Further development of theory should take these unique circumstances into account.

My study is also limited as I relied on the accounts of participants. A stronger study within the critical realism philosophy warrants more direct observations in addition to interviews. I may have missed key aspects of participants' experiences. For example, I speculated that some students may not have made friends because of their race or ethnicity. If I had observed encounters on campus, I may have gained additional information to draw stronger conclusions about some participants who could not make friends. Another limitation is that my

study sought to understand the institutional environment, including the structure, culture, and climate, as experienced by students. Observational research would have offered a more thorough examination of the university environment that is not filtered through the perspectives of participants.

Recommendations for Future Research, Policy, and Practice

Based on my findings and previous research, I offer a number of recommendations for future research, policy, and practice to support the success of working-class female students from different races and ethnicities.

Recommendations for Future Research

I offer ten distinctly different recommendations for future research. These suggestions either seek greater understanding of working-class students or address ways to change the institutional structure to increase working-class students' success.

Extend research. Foremost, I recommend that this study be extended to follow participants through their entire first year to capture the full year of transition, as well as beyond the first year through graduation to better understand success of working-class female students. Additionally, since participants' definitions of success refer to achievements after they earn their degrees, research should also extend beyond graduation to gain understanding about success of working-class students once they leave the university.

Students who leave. More thorough research should be conducted on students who are not successful in college since such students may struggle most with the institutional environment. Future research that follows working-class students through their undergraduate experiences, should highlight the experiences of students who ultimately do not continue to attend to develop a more thorough understanding of why working-class students depart college.

Presently, most research only looks at successful students or currently enrolled students. I also recommend additional research that focuses solely on the experience of students who were not successful in college. Recruitment could happen outside the university environment, perhaps in urban communities, to gather the accounts of working-class students who recently attended a university but withdrew.

Different populations. Furthermore, the concept of working-class cultural wealth warrants additional research on students from diverse backgrounds. Additional studies should explore the experiences of working-class Southeast Asian, Native American, and Middle Eastern students among others. Additionally, further research is needed on female working-class Black and White students since my study only had a few participants from each race. Additionally, I recommend that comparable studies be conducted with male students. I speculate that racial and ethnic discrepancies may be greater for males than for females since Latino and Black working-class males have the lowest levels of success in higher education. Furthermore, I anticipate findings may be different for men since women and men experience college differently (Allen, 2011). Furthermore, additional research should be conducted at institutions that have different amounts of institutional financial aid to better account for factors related to students' financial need. By accounting for the experiences and perspectives of these populations, a more complete picture of working-class students' success may be gleaned. Considering the challenges that I had recruiting students from diverse backgrounds, I also suggest that future research is multi-institutional with a recruitment plan that seeks at least five working-class students of each identity group from each institution to account for both the university context as well as intersectional identities.

STEM research. I also recommend additional research that specifically focuses on

working-class women in STEM fields to identify institutional factors that enhance students' success. Participants in my study enjoyed their STEM courses in high school but were consumed with stress and anxiety over them in college. Of the seven participants who pursued STEM majors, two changed majors, one considered it, and another likely stopped attending college. Outcomes related to STEM courses were lowest for working-class female students. Thus, research that addresses structural issues with STEM courses has great potential for positive outcomes related to student success.

Student success and class sizes. I also recommend institutional case study research that specifically includes a cost-benefit analysis regarding course sizes and students' success. Course sizes have increased to help institutions cut costs associated with instruction. Employing a critical realist perspective that thoroughly examines all institutional costs and revenues associated with courses sizes can help university administrators make more objective decisions about the value of large class sizes. For example, a researcher may look at costs associated with one 300-student math or science class as well as lost tuition revenue from students who drop the class, do not pass the class, change majors, or leave the institution. Data could be compared to projections for courses that have only 30 to 40 students with added tuition revenue from increased student success.

Two-year institutions. This study only focused on working-class students' experiences at a four-year institution; yet, most working-class students attend two-year institutions. Additionally, participants in my study associated two-year institutions with lower prestige, low rigor, and lower levels of success. Yet, when they struggled in their courses, they considered enrolling at two-year institutions to receive more personalized attention. This begs the question, what quality of education do students at two-year institutions receive? Are two-year institutions

perceived to be lesser than four-year institutions because they offer less dominant cultural capital in the form of prestige or lower outcomes related to student success? A critical realist lens may reveal findings that two-year institutions have strong educational outcomes when controlling for social class. Thus, additional research should explore the experiences of working-class students who attend two-year institutions. Researchers could examine similarities and differences with participants in my study to compare the transition experiences at two-year and four-year institutions.

Institutional prestige. Similarly, participants' perceptions about two-year institutions and highly-selective institutions suggest that prestige matters to them. Yet, my questions about success did not draw responses that implied my participants' sought prestige as an outcome. Thus, additional research may explore how working-class students perceive prestige and how they may or may not leverage prestige to achieve their goals. Future research should focus on working-class students' decision making about which type of college to attend to address this research question.

Institutional values. Future research should be conducted that uses a critical realist lens to understand what institutions of higher education value. Since my study suggests that working-class students have attributes that align with the educational mission of institutions of higher education, researchers should also explore if institutions espouse values and align practices with their educational missions. Employing a critical lens using a case study design will help researchers objectively look at what institutions value. Future research should include faculty, staff, administrators, and students' perceptions and accounts of their experiences at the institution. Furthermore, future research should include audits of course offerings, events, curricula. Additionally, it should include an examination of financial data to gain understanding

of how institutions invest resources. Multiple case studies could be conducted at institutions that have very degrees of success for working-class students to draw comparisons. Findings could offer suggestions to help universities have greater mission alignment. On the other hand, findings may also show that values and practices are in alignment with the educational mission at each institution despite working-class students experiencing varying degrees of success at each institution. Such findings would suggest that other factors influence working-class students' success.

Faculty perceptions. I also recommend future research that explores faculty perceptions of working-class students as well as their teaching approaches. My study showed an association between class size and course subject with participants' perceptions of faculty fostering a supportive and nurturing learning environment. Faculty may use more impersonal teaching methods when they teach larger classes. However, my study did not address the perceptions of faculty. Faculty members, regardless of class size, may perceive working-class students as either deficient or having great wealth. Additional research should be conducted to explore faculty perceptions. Furthermore, researchers may explore strategies to help faculty members who perceive students as has having deficits, have more objective perceptions of working-class students. A mixed-method design using pretest-posttests and interventions could be used to identify promising practices that help change faculty perceptions to understand working-class cultural wealth and help foster success of working-class students.

High-impact practices. Further my research warrants the creation and evaluation of high impact practices for working-class students. I offer a few ideas below, in Recommendations for Practice, on how to foster a more nurturing campus environment. I hope to see research and evaluation that implements such practices and then measures the effects on

working-class students' success.

Recommendations for Policy

I offer four policy recommendations based on the findings from this study. They include free tuition for working-class students, greater faculty development, improving data collection, and strategic performance-based funding metrics to guide institutional practices.

Free tuition for working-class students. Free college would reduce large barriers for working-class students and offer greater opportunity to increase students' success. In 2017, at the time of publication, the state of New York was working on plans to phase in free education. It was included in their 2017 state budget and would be phased in starting the 2017 fall semester.

Some people may argue that wealthier students will only attend elite private institutions; thus, free education would lead to institutions will become more stratified. However, currently students choose between no education and the most affordable option. Within a model of free higher education, students would have another affordable option. Free college for working-class students is unlikely to undo social stratification in education. However, it may have an overall positive effect for individuals and society. Businesses increasingly demand a well-educated workforce. Additionally, if there are more working-class students earning college degrees, they may also have more knowledge and agency to fight against inequities. Thus, free education for working-class students can lead to greater success. However, free education may lead to challenges with admissions to college. With more people applying to college, studies that address how such policies would affect students with lower academic preparation, racial and social class stratification, and changes to admissions standards are necessary to minimize unintended consequences.

Some may argue that the quality of education would be affected if institutions lost funding to provide free tuition to working-class students. However, I argue that this would signal a shift toward investment in higher education in the United States after years of states divesting in higher education. Additionally, some may argue that less prepared students would attend college. This line of thinking contradicts my findings. Students with fewer finances should not be equated with having less academic preparation. Universities can maintain their admission standards while alleviating a huge barrier to working-class students' success by reducing the costs associated with college. Institutions may find that they admit more students. Thus, proactive enrollment management can help public institutions manage the changing landscape.

Private institutions may also be affected by such policy shifts. As participants in my study made enrollment decisions based on the cost, working-class students would likely attend free, public institutions. With potential declining enrollments, private universities may resort to recruiting wealthier students who can pay tuition, recruiting students who cannot gain admission to public schools, or closing down. Thus, while higher education becomes more accessible, it will likely become more stratified. Policy-makers, researchers, and practitioners may look to K-12 systems to gain greater insights about how free public education could change the landscape of higher education. I recommend policy-makers examine K-12 districts where public schools have high outcomes as well as public higher education systems in other countries that offer free tuition to implement policies and practices that ensure a stable model of making higher education for affordable and accessible to working-class students.

Faculty development. Currently, in most districts, public K-12 teachers must receive certification in teaching. However, no such standard exists within higher education in the United

States. One way to increase professors using better teaching methods is to require certification in teaching as a requirement to teach courses in higher education. Such a policy could improve teaching practices in college courses. Many researchers have called for greater faculty development (see Gyurko, MacCormack, Bless, & Jodl, 2016). Thus, my study adds to this call for faculty development to increase the success of working-class students.

Improving data. Mortenson (2007) found that only 12% of students with low-incomes graduated within six years compared to 73% of high income students. My study offers many insights to increase success for working-class students. Yet, researchers and practitioners are limited in researching working-class student success because many institutions of higher education do not collect data on students' family incomes. Furthermore, federal financial aid data, which uses family income, is restricted from use for research purposes. Current research is often based on census data or large quantitative data sets from the U.S. Department of Education.

Some researchers may argue that students often do not know their family incomes; thus, data may not be reliable. However, I argue that some data is better than none. Currently researchers have resorted using first-generation status and race and ethnicity as proxies for income. However, as the percentage of first-generation students decreases, data will be unreliable indicators of working-class status. Furthermore, the use of race and ethnicity perpetuates the conflation of race with social class and has been proven to be inaccurate (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Thus, I strongly recommend that policy makers add family income and student income to data reporting requirements. I also advocate for the research use of FAFSA reported data. Though not all students complete FAFSA, it offers a standardized formula to compare students. Together these data would allow for greater means to measure changes in success for working-class students. This change would draw universities to

collect this data from students. Furthermore, it would allow for increased research and assessment on outcomes related to students' social class.

Performance-based funding metrics. Almost all states in the United States have incorporated a performance-based funding model to fund public institutions of higher education. Many higher education administrators and professionals lament that such metrics do not take into consideration of the diversity of students at institutions within their respective state. Metrics that solely look at retention and graduation rates fail to account for the challenges associated with students who have lower-incomes. I argue that policy-makers should devise performance funding models that require institutions to report metrics of student success for students in different income bands or from neighborhoods that have low-incomes as reported to in the U.S. Census. Policies would give institutions highest percentage of funds for success of students in the lowest family-income/neighborhood bands. Policy makers could examine current data and run regression analyses to find the optimal equation to calculate funding to be able to support institutional operations and incentivize institutions to focus on working-class student success.

Currently, public institutions with the wealthiest students, the flagships, receive the greatest funding while institutions that serve students with the lowest-incomes receive the least funding. Yet, low-income students often require the most resources and support. New performance-based funding models could offer more socially just funding in higher education.

Recommendations for Practice

Though this study did not directly focus on the college expenses, findings support that finances are a critical factor in working-class students' success. If a student cannot pay tuition or take care of basic needs, it is unlikely that a nurturing environment will matter. Though policy-makers and higher education administrators cannot change students' social class, they can

identify ways to reduce the cost of attendance for working-class students. Because participants in this study were high achieving and sometimes had large financial aid packages, they may have been better off than many working-class students. I speculate that students who come to college with less preparation and less aid, would have even greater challenges. Still even participants in this study had many struggles related to their finances. Their experiences highlights the pervasiveness of the financial burden of higher education.

Furthermore, finances and academic preparation are not the only barriers to working-class students' success, as illustrated in this study. Structural barriers, such as class sizes and college expenses, also influence students' success. Additionally, some participants did not experience support from the campus, but they may have had various forms of capital that helped them succeed during the first semester of college. As such, my recommendations address how to maximize students' assets and reduce structural barriers.

Reduce the financial burden. I recommend that institutions conduct expense, process, and policy audits to ensure that students are not inadvertently harmed or limited by items or experiences that cost money. For example, institutions should check to see if they have low-cost, affordable, grocery options, affordable textbooks, or E-books. Additionally, institutions should consider rental programs for laptops, tablets, and other forms of technology that students may need for their coursework.

Universities may employ practices similar to K-12 schools by including notation on students' accounts that they qualify for a fee waiver. Each year, students could apply to receive a fee waiver. Then, students would not have to make repeated requests throughout the year. Institutions could slowly institute such a program without great financial risks by gradually including items for which students can receive waivers. Institutions could request private donors

to fund student fee waiver programs. Each year institutions would designate items eligible for fee waivers based on the amount of funding available and how essential the item is to students' success.

Additionally, institutions should have emergency funds for students, like Oneyda, who face sudden hardships. Oneyda received a $500 emergency grant that helped her pay tuition for the semester. Such practices could reduce the financial burden of college and potentially prevent students from leaving college over expenses that seem unmanageable to students but minimal to universities.

Create a more nurturing environment. A key, overarching, recommendation is that universities shift away from a culture of independence and more toward a nurturing and supportive student-centered culture. Given that cultures shift slowly, I recommend the following focused and targeted strategies to facilitate this transition and improve outcomes for working-class students.

Reduce class sizes. Institutions should reduce class sizes and incorporate more engaging teaching methods to increase the success of working-class women in STEM fields. In fact, I recommend redirecting funds from supplemental programs, such as the women in engineering program from my study, toward hiring more faculty to reduce course sizes.

Engagement in major. Ideally, each discipline should strive to have students take at least one required course related to their major during their first semester of college. However, if this is not possible, institutions could use first-year seminars as a substitute. Many universities have first-year seminars on a variety of topics. I recommend that practitioners create first-year seminars that directly relate to students' intended majors and careers to peek their interests since my findings suggest that working-class students are career focused. I recommend that one-credit

seminars are fun, engaging, and related to foundational aspects of their field of study. For example, to design the curriculum, instructors may consider why students are drawn to the field. Instructors may appeal to working-class students' desires to help other people by creating curricula that shows how professionals in their chosen fields solve real-world problems, inspire others, and bring forth change. Seminars could also be practical, experimental, project based, and engaging. For example, a nursing seminar might consist of a thought provoking curriculum that includes case studies, ethical dilemmas in nursing, types of nurses, different places of employment, and career paths for nurses. This helps students develop more concrete understanding of their field and fosters excitement toward their degree while they take prerequisites. Furthermore, students will likely meet other students who are in similar majors and form friendships.

Seminars could also be constructed to help undecided students hone in on a career path via topic or project-based seminars. A course could focus on a topic or issue that appeals to professionals from many fields. The curriculum could explore how different professionals approach an issue. For example, a topic might be solving poverty in communities. The curriculum would include perspectives of politicians, school administrators, social workers, police, businesses, non-profit organizations, community organizers, public health professionals, and so on.

Facilitated dialogues within and beyond courses. My study suggests that working-class students thrive in nurturing environments. Nurturing environments are where students are validated and faculty and staff use examples or facilitate discussions about topics that are meaningful to them.

My findings also suggest that working-class students seek engagement in constructive

dialogues to learn from individuals from different backgrounds. Thus, I recommend faculty and staff facilitate discussions about different cultures, perspectives, and worldviews. Furthermore, I believe working-class students are uniquely capable of leading discussions about differences because they have strong empathy skills. Though they are varied in their knowledge about issues related to inclusivity, students in my study were eager to engage with students who were from different backgrounds. Furthermore, most participants had experiences with diverse environments, injustices, and hardships. Thus, they could pull from their own experiences when participating in discussions.

Targeted data-drive outreach. Institutions should adopt proactive, targeted approaches to engage with students. To illustrate this recommendation, I draw from Jane's experience. Though Jane received an email that she was selected for financial aid verification, she still anticipated that LUU would reach out to her to help resolve challenges with her financial aid package. However, the institution's practice was for students to initiate assistance. When Jane did reach out, she was redirected to other offices, given short answers by the financial aid office front desk staff, and never was provided thorough guidance on how to complete and troubleshoot the verification process. The institution's independent culture and practice to not reach out with Jane's lack of financial resources and expectation of a more nurturing environment ultimately led to the situation where she never received financial aid.

In contrast, Jane's experience with the residence life professional who knocked on her door to encourage her to get involved was successful. Thus, I recommend that targeted outreach should not be limited to students' self-reported survey responses related to their engagement. This is a common practice among residence life, student success offices, and academic advisors. However, other units within the university may be more effective at fostering student success. I

recommend that resources be directed to units that are more closely aligned with factors related to working-class students' success so that those units are also able to engage in direct outreach to students.

In an environment with limited funds, financial and academic-related outreach should be the first priority of the institution. I recommend that administrators employ practices and resources to allow financial aid offices to call and meet with students who have unaccepted or undisbursed aid and students who were selected for financial aid verification. I also recommend that either instructors, advisors, or registrar staff contact students who have not logged onto the course websites or accessed online materials. These are all strong indicators that students are struggling.

Practitioners should run these data checks during key times of the academic year to help students resolve challenges before students get too far behind. Furthermore, outreach should be personalized with opportunities for students to attend small group workshops or one-on-one advising to learn how to navigate these processes. Though advising is likely to initially be costly to the institution, it likely would pay for itself with reductions in students withdrawing or transferring schools.

Improve services. Students who are pressed for time would also benefit from routines. Professors should have homework and quizzes on a weekly routine. Routines also works with student groups, meetings, study groups, office hours, and so on. Furthermore, campus offices should consider how accessible they are to working-class students who work or cannot stay on campus late at night. Units should look at their hours of operations, when activities are scheduled, and how clear information is on websites. Websites must be explicit, detailed, easy to

navigate, and inform students of all options. This helps students who do not spend much time on campus still navigate resources.

Enhance students' assets and support systems. Findings from my study also suggest that working-class can experience increased success with strong support systems that enhance their working-class cultural wealth. Thus, I identify five key areas that practitioners should focus on to enhance students' support networks.

High school support. University practitioners should identify ways to work with high school counselors to enhance students' knowledge about what to expect when they begin college. My research suggests that students already receive a lot of information about college. For example, participants knew that they should visit office hours, keep up on readings and homework, use schedules, and attend all their classes. Furthermore, they either expected or were already used to rigorous coursework. However, they were not prepared to eat alone or not see the same people throughout the day. Many participants also did not have the skills or confidence to make new friends in environments where they did not have to talk to one another.

Though my strongest recommendation is for practitioners to take the lead in changing the institutional environment so that it is more nurturing, I also think it's important to prepare students with as much information as possible. Thus, I recommend that university professionals, such as recruiters, offer high school guidance counselors with realistic information about the first semester as well as strategies to help students adjust to college. Participants in this study struggled to make new friends. Furthermore, they did not anticipate this challenge. Thus, if they are given more information in high school, students may be more intentional and proactive with identifying and staying connected to people they meet during orientation, welcome events, or on

their first day of classes. Still, I emphasize that institutions still should change the environment to better support students' social engagement.

Family support. Additionally, practitioners should continue to identify ways to engage with families throughout the students' college experience. My findings suggest that the parents of working-class students are interested in participants' career prospects. Furthermore, students sometimes face pressure from their parents to pursue a specific career. Thus, practitioners may create newsletters and websites for parents to teach them about career opportunities within each major. Parents may be more at ease if they have a better idea of the opportunities potentially available to their child. Practitioners should also guide parents toward being informed about internship opportunities, scholarships, undergraduate research, and so on. These opportunities appeal to all families regardless of social class. Furthermore, parents may help increase working-class students' engagement in these activities as working-class students may not even be aware of such opportunities. Tutorials and workshops on financial literacy and student loans would help both students and parents have more information to make more informed decisions about paying for college. These recommendations draw in parents and help both students and parents navigate college.

Furthermore, practitioners often engage with parents with the assumption that parents have finances to support students. During orientation, student affairs professionals may refer to parents allowing students to use credit cards, funding university accounts, purchasing gift baskets, and attending campus activities that cost money. Institutions should also consider ways to draw support from families that have no disposable income. Practitioners could have fun and humorous presentations for parents on how to support their children while spending as little money as possible. Even high-income families might be drawn to such presentations.

Universities could inform parents of creative free ways to let students know they care, explore activities near campus that do not cost money, and so on. Universities might also consider offering parents a select number of meal passes to eat with their child on campus or attend campus sporting events. These activities draw parents to campus rather than students away from campus. Furthermore, it also helps parents grow more comfortable with the campus culture. Universities could also share information on low-cost resources including where to get food, travel, buy supplies, seek medical care, and access public assistance.

On-campus employment. When students work off campus, their lives and time commitments are fragmented. Thus, university practitioners should develop mechanisms to target working-class students for leadership employment opportunities on campus. Universities can use campus employment as an additional opportunity to teach students valuable skills to aid in their success. A campus job not only provides students with income, but also leadership skills, mentorship, and relationships. Furthermore, my research suggests that working-class students are hard-working, dedicated, resourceful, empathetic, and academically committed. Because working-class students already have so many characteristics that are desired by employers, they may be capable of handling greater responsibilities and potentially eliminate entry-level professional positions. I recommend that institutions redirect resources to hiring student employees and compensating skilled supervisors who can mentor and develop student leaders.

One way to incentivize units to hire student employees would be to create a general campus fund for student employment. Units on campus could apply for funds to hire student employees. They would be required to have a supportive supervision structure. The additional funds would serve as an incentive for departments to hire more students. Furthermore, students

would benefit from having their job near their classes; thus, they would have shorter commutes, possibly grow more connected to campus, develop friendships, and have a stronger support network.

Facilitating peer relationships. Participants in this study sought to study with friends. Thus, I recommend that institutions build students' capacity to learn on their own by fostering peer interactions. All participants initially struggled to make friends. Universities should redirect funds from large concerts and events and toward facilitating regular, routine activities where first-year students can engage with the same people many times a week. Practitioners may consider offering courses in blocks so students take multiple courses with the same students. Furthermore, universities may repurpose current practices such as advising to help facilitate peer relationships with regularly scheduled small group advising sessions. Just as student organizations are often related to majors, student organizations could be constructed to be associated with common first-year courses, such as chemistry. Students could compete in competitions or perform chemistry experiments with the assistance of a faculty advisor. Student affairs professionals should ensure that the university supports working-class students' purposeful focus on academics with many identity and major related organizations and events where student feel that they are learning, bringing forth change, or helping others.

Instructional development. Many participants experienced challenges with inexperienced professors and teaching assistants. To truly use student centered approaches in classrooms, universities must invest in instructional development. I recommend that institutions commit resources toward training professors and teaching assistants on teaching methods, classroom management, and student development. Teaching assistants might be required to take credit-bearing courses from education faculty that would count toward their masters, doctoral, or

professional degree progress. Furthermore, university administrators may incentivize faculty members to attend courses or workshops by giving them credit for university service, funding for a graduate assistant, a meal plan to eat in a dining facility, or funding for materials to enhance student learning in their courses such as i-clickers, manipulatives, models, video, software, and so on. These ideas are either low-cost or have the added benefit of increasing student learning or engagement.

Conclusion

Working-class students have assets and strengths that I describe as working-class cultural wealth. They are aspirational, hardworking, empathetic, academically-focused, and economically-minded. Furthermore, working-class cultural wealth aligns with the educational mission of higher education as well as skills and traits that employers seek most among new professionals (National Association of College Employers, 2016). Hence, working-class students are primed for success in institutions of higher education.

Though this study focused on the experiences of participants, I return to the original purpose of this study: to examine the university culture and climate to increase success for working-class students. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this study is that university environments can both support and hinder working-class students' success. For universities to increase success of working-class students, higher education professionals must reimagine how the university is structured to foster a more nurturing environment. By helping students better realize their strengths and eliminating arbitrary or unnecessary barriers, higher education professionals can help working-class students be more successful.

This study offers a foundation for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to reconsider their understanding of working-class students. It also suggests that more work must

be done at institutions to better support strengths of working-class students. Following the philosophical position of critical realism, this study challenges researchers and higher education professions in academic and student affairs to more objectively examine institutional practices. Perhaps it is not the students that must change and adapt to the institution as they already have goals and attributes that align with the mission of higher education. Findings suggest that institutional environment must shift to increase students' success via better alignment with their educational mission.

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APPENDIX A: SCREENING FORM

1. Are you female and over the age of 18? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. What is your race/ethnicity? ☐ Black ☐ Latina ☐ White ☐ Other

3. When did you complete high school? ☐ Spring 2016 ☐ Fall 2015 ☐ Over a year ago

Consider the people who primarily raised you when answering the next two questions:

4. Check each person's highest level of education (If you are uncertain, estimate)

Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Level of Education
☐	☐	☐	Less than seventh grade
☐	☐	☐	Middle school (7th to 9th grade)
☐	☐	☐	Some high school (10th or 11th grade)
☐	☐	☐	High school graduate
☐	☐	☐	Some college (at least one year) or specialized training
☐	☐	☐	Four-year college degree
☐	☐	☐	Graduate or professional degree

5. Check the box that corresponds closest to each person's occupation

Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Occupation
☐	☐	☐	Doesn't work
☐	☐	☐	janitor, maid, personal attendant, farm laborer, dishwasher, machine cleaner, car washer, usher, bellhop
☐	☐	☐	bartender, busser, wait staff, cook, nanny, laborer, garbage worker, warehouse worker, drycleaner, groundskeeper
☐	☐	☐	bus driver, truck driver, child caretaker, machine operator, butcher, nursing aid, sewer, roofer, hairdresser
☐	☐	☐	low ranking military officer, carpenter, tailor, postal worker, electrician, receptionist, LPNs, firefighter, flight attendant
☐	☐	☐	bank teller, cashier, sales worker, dental assistant, clerical worker, bill collector, therapy assistant
☐	☐	☐	small business owner, secretary, sales manager, technician, teacher aide, military sergeant, retail department head
☐	☐	☐	Semi-small business owner, insurance agent, artist, manager, social worker, elementary school teacher, counselor, analyst
☐	☐	☐	Medium business owner, accountant, computer professional, nurse, professor, high school teacher, administrator
☐	☐	☐	CEO, business executive, lawyer, physician, government official, high military officer, financial manager, engineer, scientist

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Alias (pick a name you like): _____
2. Age: _____
3. Race/Ethnicity: _____
4. National Origin: _____
5. Where will you live when you start college?

   _____ Residence Hall

   _____ Near campus, alone

   _____ Near campus, with roommates

   _____ With family

   _____ Other (describe): _____

6. Do you have children? Yes No

   If yes, how many: _____

7. Are you the primary caretaker for someone else? Yes No
8. Please estimate your family's total household income?

   _____ Less than $10,000

   _____ $10,000 to $14,999

   _____ $15,000 to $24,999

   _____ $25,000 to $34,999

   _____ $35,000 to $49,999

   _____ $50,000 to $74,999

   _____ $75,000 to $99,999

   _____ $100,000 to $149,999

   _____ $150,000 to $199,999

   _____ $200,000 or more

9. How many individuals depend on the income you indicated above? _____

10. How do you intend to pay for college (tuition, room, food, books, etc.)?

_____ Scholarships

_____ Grants

_____ Federal loans

_____ Private loans

_____ Parent Plus Loans

_____ Savings

_____ On-campus job

_____ Off-campus job

_____ Parent or family member

_____ Not sure yet

11. If you currently are employed, what do you do?

Job: _____, Hours/week _____

Job: _____, Hours/week _____

12. If you will be employed while attending college, what will you do?

Job: _____, Hours/week _____

Job: _____, Hours/week _____

13. Are you participating in a Summer Precollege Program? Yes No

14. What was your ACT/SAT Score?

16 and lower 17 to 20 21 to 24 25 and higher

15. What was your high school cumulative GPA?

Lower than 2.0 2.000 to 2.499 2.500 to 2.999 3.000-3.499 3.500 & higher

16. Did you take AP/IB/college courses in high school? Yes No

a. If yes, how many college credits were you granted? _____

17. What major are you pursuing? _____

18. What career do you plan to pursue after completing your education?

_____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide 1

Questions for Interview 1 sets the context for their transition. Specifically, I learn about the student and their "community cultural wealth" which comprises the *Self* domain of their transition. I also inquire about aspects of their lives that may be significant to their transition, as described in Schlossberg's transition model. For example, I will learn about their possible *support*, their *situation*, and their *strategies*. I will continue to ask questions related to these domains in subsequent interviews to gauge how they may be used throughout the transition. I particularly am interested in how they perceive the campus culture and climate and, furthermore, how they navigate it.

Interview Question	Research Question
I'm going to start by asking you a few questions about your background and then I'll ask you about college.	
1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? What are your interests?	2 –Self
a. Who do you rely on most for personal and academic support? Who would you say is a role model/mentor?	2 –Support
b. How do you cope with setbacks you encounter in life in general and in college	2 –Strategy
c. How did you learn/develop these coping strategies	2 –Strategy
2. Tell me about your family.	2 –Self, Support
a. Who has been influential to you? How?	2 –Support
b. What have you learned from them?	2 –Self
c. What was it like growing up?	2 –Situation
d. What are some traditions in your family?	2 –Self
e. How would your family describe you?	2 –Self
3. Tell me about your school.	2 –Situation, Self
a. How do you think high school prepared you for college?	2 –Situation
b. What about high school did you like?	2 –Self, Situation
c. What about high school did you not like?	2 –Self, Situation
d. Were you involved in activities? sports? What courses did you take (AP/IB/math/language)? What did you gain from them?	2 –Self, Situation
e. In high school, what would you do if you didn't understand something or needed help?	2 –Strategy, Support
f. Did you attend public or private school(s)? Where is it located (city/suburb?) What was the racial makeup?	2 –Self, Situation
g. How would you describe the culture?	2 –Self, Situation
4. Describe your teachers.	2 –Support
a. How were they supportive?	2 –Support
b. How were they unsupportive?	2 –Support
c. Did anyone at your school (teachers, coaches) have a major influence on you? Describe them.	2 –Support
d. How would your teachers describe you?	2 –Self
5. Tell me about your friends.	2 –Support
a. Are any of them going to college? Where?	2 –Support, Self (culture)
b. How have your friends influenced you?	2 –Support
c. How would your friends describe you?	2 –Self
6. What roles does spirituality/religion play in your life?	2 –Self
a. What does this mean to you?	2 –Self

b. What impact has this had on your life?	2 –Self
7. Please describe your neighborhood.	2 –Self (culture), Situation
a. Do people keep to themselves? Rely on one another? Look out for one another?	2 –Support, Self (culture)
b. How do you interact with your neighbors?	2 –Support, Self (culture)
c. Would you describe your neighborhood as working-class? Middle-class? Describe the race and ethnic makeup of your neighborhood?	2 –Self (culture), Situation
8. Describe your job? How has it affected your life? How often do you work?	2 –Self, 2 –Situation
Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about college	
9. What has led you to attend LUU?	1 –Culture/Climate
a. What/where else did you consider? (Another school? Working?)	2 –Situation, Self
b. Did anyone help you or encourage you to attend college? What did they do?	2 –Support
c. What major do you think you'll pursue? What do you like about this field? (undecided: what fields could you not see yourself in?)	2 –Self
a. What have you done to prepare for college?	2 –Strategy
b. What do you still have to do?	2 –Strategy
10. Describe your experience at New Student Orientation?	1 –Culture/Climate
a. How did it make you feel about college?	1 –Culture/Climate
b. What did you learn from this experience?	1 –Culture/Climate
11. What do you think college will be like during the first semester?	2 –Self, Situation
a. What doubts or concerns do you have?	2 –Self, Situation
b. What are you looking forward to?	2 –Self
c. How do you feel about it? (excited, nervous, anxious, worried, unaffected)	2 –Self
d. What challenges/barriers do you think might you encounter? How do you anticipate manage this?	2 –Self, Situation, Strategy
12. Do you feel prepared for the coursework? Why/why not?	2 –Self, Situation
13. Describe what success looks like for you?	3 –Success
a. What do you hope to gain from college?	3 –Success
b. What do you hope to achieve in life?	3 –Success

Interview Guide 2

Questions for Interview 2 gauges the students' perceptions of the campus culture and climate, how different it is or isn't from their precollege experiences, and what they are drawing on to manage the transition. I continue to use Schlossberg's transition model to frame their transition. I learn about how their *self*, *support*, *situation*, and *strategies* influence the transition. I will continue to ask questions related to these domains in the final interview to gauge how they may be used throughout the transition. I particularly am interested in how they perceive the campus culture and climate and, furthermore, how they navigate it. Finally, I seek to understand what success looks like for them and, furthermore, if they are moving toward success (as defined by both the institution and by them).

Interview Question	Research Question
I'm going to start by asking your experiences so far in college.	
1. How is college so far?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
2. How would you describe the campus to someone back home?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
3. Do you feel like you belong –like you are a part of the campus community?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
4. What aspects of college have been difficult or challenging for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How did you respond, react?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage the challenges or difficulties?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to for support?	2 –Support
5. What aspects of college have been positive/rewarding for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you reacted/responded to them?	2 –Self
c. How have they helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to/told about/participated with/celebrated with?	2 –Support
6. What aspects of college have been the most surprising for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Strategy
c. What have you done to manage this? Or How have they helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
7. What aspects of college have you been least prepared for?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation, Self
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage this?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
8. Looking back on your first interview, how accurate were your perceptions about college? What did you get wrong? What did you get right?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation, Self
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to adjust?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
9. What aspects of college have been confusing?	1 –Culture//Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to adjust?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
10. When have you felt most stressed?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Self

a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage this?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
11. When have you felt most relaxed?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How have this helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
12. Who do you primarily reach out to for support? What about them is helpful?	2 –Support
13. I'm going to ask you questions about different aspects of your experience. Please describe how each of these have been and how you are managing them. (Catch all question in case aspects were not touched on in above questions)	1 –Culture Climate, 2 –Situation, Strategy, Support, & Self
a. Classes	
b. Talking to instructors	
c. Academic advisors	
d. RAs/Peer Mentors	
e. Job/Working	
f. Making friends/peer relationships	
g. Getting involved	
h. Navigating offices	
c. Living independently	
d. Managing time	
i. Studying	
j. Paying for college	
k. Friends from home	
l. Family	
m. Mentors/Role models	
n. Programs on campus	
o. Financial situation	
p. Health	
q. Self-image	
r. Cultural expectations	
s. Is there anyone or anything that I missed?	
14. Have you considered transferring or dropping out?	3 –Success
a. What factors could lead you to make such a change?	2 –Situation, Self, Strategy
b. What would you do instead?	2 –Situation, Self, Strategy
15. I'd like to ask you a few questions that I asked in your last interview. Describe what success looks like for you?	3 –Success
a. What do you hope to gain from college?	3 –Success
b. What do you hope to achieve in life?	3 –Success

Interview Guide 3

Questions for Interview 3 continues to gauge participants' perceptions of the campus culture and climate, how different it is or isn't from their precollege experiences, and what they are drawing on to manage the transition. I continue to use Schlossberg's transition model to frame their transition. I learn about how their *self*, *support*, *situation*, and *strategies* influence the transition. Questions are similar to the last interview so that I can further understand their changes. I particularly am interested in how they perceive the campus culture and climate and, furthermore, how they navigate it. Finally, I seek to understand what success looks like for them and, furthermore, if they are moving toward success (as defined by both the institution and by them).

Interview Question	Research Question
I'm going to start by asking your experiences so far in college.	
1. How would you describe your overall college experience so far?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
2. How would you describe the campus to someone back home?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
3. Do you feel like you belong –like you are a part of the campus community?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
4. Looking back, what aspects of college have been difficult or challenging for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How did you respond, react?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage the challenges or difficulties?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to for support?	2 –Support
5. What aspects of college have been positive/rewarding for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you reacted/responded to them?	2 –Self
c. How have they helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to/told about/participated with/celebrated with?	2 –Support
6. What aspects of college have been the most surprising for you?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Strategy
c. What have you done to manage this? Or How have they helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
7. What aspects of college have you been least prepared for?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation, Self
a. How (and how much) has it affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage this?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
8. What aspects of college have been confusing?	1 –Culture//Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to adjust?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
9. When have you felt most stressed?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Self
a. How (and how much) have they affected you?	2 –Self
b. How have you responded/reacted because of this?	2 –Self
c. What have you done to manage this?	2 –Strategy
d. Who have you turned to?	2 –Support
10. When have you felt most relaxed?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
a. How have this helped you manage college?	2 –Strategy
11. Who do you primarily reach out to for support? What about them	2 –Support

is helpful?	
12. Looking back on your second interview, how have your perceptions changed?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation, Self
13. What initial feelings/thoughts do you still have?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation, Self
14. What events were most influential to your experience?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
15. What events were most detrimental to your experience?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
16. Looking back, what could have made it better?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
17. Specifically, is there anything at the institution that could have been different to make your experience better?	1 –Culture/Climate, 2 –Situation
18. I'm going to ask you questions about different aspects of your experience. Please describe how each of these have been and how you are managing them. (catch all question in case not touched on in above questions)	1 –Culture Climate, 2 –Situation, Strategy, Support, Self
a. Classes	
b. Talking to instructors	
c. Academic advisors	
d. RAs/Peer Mentors	
e. Job/Working	
f. Making friends/peer relationships	
g. Getting involved	
h. Navigating offices	
e. Living independently	
f. Managing time	
i. Studying	
j. Paying for college	
k. Friends from home	
l. Family	
m. Mentors/Role models	
n. Programs on campus	
o. Financial situation	
p. Health	
q. Self-image	
r. Cultural expectations	
s. Is there anyone or anything that I missed?	
19. How has your educational experience been shaped by a. Your experiences prior to college (family, school, etc.)	2 –Self, Situation, Support, Strategy
b. Your race or ethnicity?	2 –Self
c. Your gender?	2 –Self
d. Your income?	2 –Self, Situation
20. I'd like to ask you a few questions that I asked in your last interview. Describe what success looks like for you?	3 –Success
21. What are your future plans for your education?	3 –Success, 2 –Self
a. Has this changed from what you were planning over the summer?	2 –Self
b. If so, how? What factors contributed to this change?	2 –Situation, Self
c. If not, what do you think supports this current direction?	2 –Situation, Self
22. Have you ever considered transferring or dropping out?	3 –Success
a. What factors could lead you to make such a change?	2 –Situation, Self, Strategy
b. What would you do instead?	2 –Situation, Self, Strategy
23. What do you think are challenges or barriers for your future plans for education?	2 –Situation
24. What do you hope to gain from college?	3 –Success
25. What do you hope to achieve in life?	3 –Success

Interview Guide 4

Questions for Interview 4 gauge how successful students were during their first semester of college. These questions focus on students' progress toward earning a degree. Additionally, these questions seek to understand why students' paths to success may change.

1. Are you currently enrolled at LUU?	3 –Success
a. Are you considering withdrawing or transferring? If so, why?	3 –Success
b. If you're not enrolled: Why? What are you doing instead? What is your plan for the future?	3 –Success
2. What was your Fall semester GPA?	3 –Success
3. What grade did you get in each of your classes? Were any of these unexpected?	3 –Success
4. How many credits were you enrolled in for fall?	3 –Success
5. What class(es) did you drop?	3 –Success
6. What classes are you currently enrolled in for Spring?	3 –Success
7. How many credits is this?	3 –Success
8. Have you dropped or changed anything since the start of the semester?	3 –Success
9. What is your major? Has this changed?	3 –Success
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share at all about your college experience?	

CURRICULUM VITAE

Rebecca M. Freer

EDUCATION

PhD, Urban Education: Adult, Continuing and Higher Education
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Dissertation: From high School to a Four-Year Urban University: Understanding the Transition Experiences of Latina, Black, and White Female Working-Class Students
Advisor: Dr. Carol Colbeck

ME, Higher & Postsecondary Education
Arizona State University
Capstone: Embracing New Media: Social Networking and Instant Messaging in Higher Education

BSE, English Education
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater
Minor: Mathematics

PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Associate Dean of Students, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (2016–Present)
Assistant Dean of Students, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (2010–2016)
Instructor & Counselor, McNair Scholars Program, University of Northern Colorado (2008–2010)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
Women and Leadership in Higher Education (Summer 2017)

University of Northern Colorado
McNair Research Seminar I, HESA 431 (Fall 2008, Fall 2009)
McNair Research Seminar II, HESA 432(Spring 2009, Spring 2010)
McNair Senior Capstone, HESA 433 (Fall 2009)
McNair Summer Internship (Summer 2009, Summer 2010)

Colorado State University
Introduction to Residence Life (Spring 2006, Spring 2007, Spring 2008)

Arizona State University
Resident Assistant Experience, CED 498 (Spring 2004)

Bay View High School, Milwaukee Public Schools
Student Teacher: 10th grade English, 12th grade English Proficiency (Fall 2002)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Freer, R. (2017). *Exploring the wealth of working-class students.* Student Personnel Young Professionals Learning Network Conference. Milwaukee, WI.

Freer, R., & McGinnity, T. (2013). *Student support team: Collaborative interventions for students in distress*. NASPA Regional Conference. Skokie, IL.

RESEARCH

Gender and Culture Lab, *P.I.: Silvia Canetto, Ph.D., Colorado State University* (Spring 2010)

EVALUATION

NASPA Assessment Consortium on Student Conduct & Academic Integrity, UW-Milwaukee (2012)
U.S. Department of Education Annual Performance Report, University of Northern Colorado (2008, 2009)
Program Evaluation Team, Colorado State University (2007-2008)
Tolleson Union School District: Student Profile Data: 1999-2004, Arizona State University (2004-2005)

SELECTED SERVICE

Academic Staff Committee, Chair (2016 – Present)
Chancellor's Strategic Opportunities Work Group (2016 – Present)
Practicum supervisor for 2 UWM graduate students (2016)
Chancellor's Campus Organization & Effectiveness Work Group (2015 – 2016)
Academic Staff Committee, member (2014 – 2016)
Policy Advisory Committee (2014 – 2016)
Graduate Assistant Training, Division of Student Affairs, *Chair* (2013-2016)
Reviewer, NASPA National Conference presentation submissions (2015)
Introduction to College Student Personnel Administration (AD LDSP 778) Speaker (2015)
Campus reading group, book: Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi* (2015)
Practicum supervisor for Capella University graduate student (2014)
Ethics Workshop, TRiO Summer Bridge Scholars Facilitator (2012 & 2014)
Assessment Team, Division of Student Affairs (2010 – 2014)
Campus reading group, book: Sandburg's *Lean In* (2013)
UWM Undergraduate Research Competition judge (2011 & 2012)
Research Day Oral Presentation Competition judge (2010)
Research Day Poster Presentation Competition judge (2009)

AWARDS

Outstanding New Academic Staff, Division of Student Affairs Award, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (2012)
Most Inspirational Faculty or Staff Member, Student Support Services, University of Northern Colorado (2010)