

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

Social Work Theses

Social Work

Spring 2013

The Challenges of Minority, Non-Affluent Students: Perceptions of the Transitions to College

Justin Gilliam

Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/socialwrk_students



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Gilliam, Justin, "The Challenges of Minority, Non-Affluent Students: Perceptions of the Transitions to College" (2013). *Social Work Theses*. 92.

https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/socialwrk_students/92

It is permitted to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions: (1) the original author(s) must be given proper attribution; (2) this work may not be used for commercial purposes; (3) users must make these conditions clearly known for any reuse or distribution of this work.

The Challenges of Minority, Non-Affluent Students:
Perceptions of the Transitions to College

Justin Gilliam

Providence College

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

2013

Abstract

This study explored whether low income minority students at a predominantly White institution felt socially, financially, and academically prepared for college. A review of the literature revealed that the supports necessary for low income minority students to ensure a positive transition to college are their family members, staff members at their high school, mentors, and college preparation programs. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted through interviewing eight participants who fit this study's definition of a low income minority. The findings from this study revealed that family members, mentors, staff members at their high school, and college preparation programs were supports for most of the participants. There were also underlying themes of culture shock and struggling to adjust academically, socially, and financially. Implications of this research indicated that high schools and colleges with low income minority students should have more resources and support systems in place to assist them during their transition from high school to college.

The Challenges of Minority, Non-Affluent Students:

Perceptions of the Transitions to College

Youths from non-affluent areas can sometimes struggle their freshmen year of college for multiple reasons. A few of these reasons include: poor studying habits, poor academic preparation, lack of knowledge about how to be successful in college, and financial reasons (Bergerson, 2009). Students from non-affluent areas are often the first person in their family to go to college so receiving tips and advice from someone who is knowledgeable about why students from non-affluent areas struggle their freshmen year of college will be beneficial.

A higher education gives individuals who come from a low income background the opportunity to become financially stable once he or she graduates. It is important for individuals in our society to acquire a college degree because it is very difficult to obtain a job that will support you and/or your family with just a high school diploma. This study is significant to the social work profession because some social workers work with youth from low income families; sometimes their clients' goals are to go to college and be successful. It is important for social workers to know what causes minorities from areas that have a high rate of poverty to struggle in college their freshmen year and specifically to understand what those struggles are and where they come from. If social workers are knowledgeable about these struggles, they can better assist individuals' transition more smoothly. The social worker can also try to properly prepare the student for college by making sure they have the resources to assist the student and increase success. Some students from non-affluent areas are not academically prepared for college because their high schools did not properly prepare them.

This study explored if students agreed and identified one of the reasons why they struggled academically as their high school not properly preparing them for college. This study

also provided information about how some low income minority students at a medium size Catholic college in the Northeast were in fact prepared for college while in high school. This qualitative study investigated whether or not low income, minority students tend to struggle academically in their first year at Providence College. If so, how do they struggle, and why? This study answered this question by exploring low income minority students from this college on their perceptions of being academically prepared for college their freshmen year. In this study, a “low income minority student” was defined as a student who was an African American or Hispanic and their household income is 50,000 or less annually. “Prepared” will be define as having the knowledge, skills, financial support, and confidence needed in order to be successful in college. This study also examined the study habits of students who are from non-affluent areas and explored if these students had to change their study habits freshmen year. This study’s findings were compared to the reviewed literature.

Literature Review

This reviewed literature discusses low income minority students’ perceptions of their college preparation and financial aid. It also discusses how academic preparation, planning and strategizing, and knowledge about financial aid can increase low income minority students readiness for college. Early preparation for college gives first generation and/or minority students the proper skills and confidence needed to be successful in college. But, most public high schools in low-income, urban areas tend to lack systematic communication about college, career plans, financial aid, and usually have only one college counselor who has to aid a student population ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 (Rosa, 2006).

Low income minority students have been historically underrepresented in postsecondary education, but college preparation programs are one solution geared toward increasing low income minority students’ opportunities. There are many college preparation programs which

specifically focus on low income minority students and college entrance success. These programs work with low income minority students and colleges to help prepare students for college. Preparation programs exist at federal and state levels, at higher education institutions, in K–12 schools, and under the purview of community or private organizations (Bergerson, 2009). For example a program entitled Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) was established in 1998 and became a nationwide program because of its proficient services (Bergerson, 2009). GEAR UP and similar programs provide key services that adequately prepare underrepresented minorities for college. These key services include: “academic preparation, access to information necessary for planning and strategies for using that information, and a working knowledge of financial aid and financial planning” (Bergerson, 2009, p. 92). The services of college preparation programs provide are remarkable, but Tierney and Venegas (2004) found that the majority of college preparation programs consider student aid only tangential. Some college preparation programs guarantee financial aid to students who complete the program (Tierney & Venegas, 2004). Some programs that do not offer a promise of aid try to provide counseling about opportunities for financial aid (Tierney & Venegas, 2004). Rosa (2006) stated that, “little mention is made of the critical goal of increasing awareness of college affordability and access to financial aid, even though research shows financial aid is crucial for low-income students and underrepresented students of color” (Rosa, 2006, p. 1671).

Low income minority college students’ perceptions about financial aid

Rosa (2006) used the 2004 College Access and Financial Aid Survey to explore the impact of financial aid information on low-income students and families, college aspiration, financial aid awareness, and parent background. The survey Rosa (2006) used in her study included sections on plans after high school, perceptions of how to pay for college, use of college

preparation services, and student background information. Her study found that low income minority students who are in the 11th grade were more likely to aspire to a 4-year college or university (52.7% to 68.3%) compared to the 12th graders (42.1% to 56.1%) (Rosa, 2006). She also found that the 12th graders were more likely to aspire to a community college or trade school (39.4% to 37.6%) compared to the 11th graders (24.5% to 17.1%) (Rosa, 2006). These findings “demonstrates that some of the senior students may have discovered 4-year college academic requirements only in their senior year, when there was no time to change their course of study” (Rosa, 2006, p. 1675). These findings also suggests that low income minority students in this study were not being academically prepared for college early and that they were not educated about academic requirements needed for college until their senior year. Students in this study also did not receive a sufficient amount of information about financial aid.

Yet a majority of the students in Rosa’s (2006) study indicated that they received financial aid information from teachers, counselors, or coaches. The survey also revealed that 50.9% of the 12th graders heard about financial aid information five times or more during the school year. This appears to be quite often, but this study’s findings showed that “only half of the seniors in this study were receiving this information in the schools” (Rosa, 2006, p. 1678). This finding demonstrates that minority students in this study are not receiving information about financial aid from their high school. The researcher also discovered that 41.9% of the 12th graders in the study felt that the information they received about financial aid was mostly helpful to very helpful. Rosa (2006) stated that, “these results imply that only certain students within the schools were receiving financial aid information and that methods of delivering this information might not be very effective” (Rosa, 2006, p. 1678). It is important for low income minority students to be educated about financial aid because a large amount of these students think they

cannot afford college (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). McDonough and Calderone examined the perceptual differences between college counselors and low-income families' perceptions of how much college cost and financial aid. A counselor in this study said, "money is a big issue in our population . . . we are constantly amazed when we help them fill out their application that these families are living on 10, 12, 15,000 dollars . . . and some of the people don't have the Social Security here, either . . . because they are illegal" (McDonough & Calderone, 2006 p. 1710). In Rosa's (2006) study she examined her participants' perceptions of college affordability. Her findings indicated that her participants had some working knowledge about applying for financial aid (Rosa, 2006). Rosa (2006) stated that:

"These results, especially those indicating that some respondents questioned whether they should be the recipients of college or financial aid information and whether the expense of college was prohibitive, reveal the presence of misperceptions about college affordability, potentially translate as obstacles toward going to college, and directly point to the need for increasing financial aid awareness and targeted guidance for these students" (p. 1678)

It is high school counselors' duty to educate students and parents about financial aid, but other faculty members and college preparation programs can provide information as well (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Receiving accurate information about financial aid can potentially decrease low income minority students misconceptions about financial aid. Research shows that providing these students with information about financial aid plays an important part in preparing students for college but, academic preparation is also crucial.

Academic preparation

As perceptions about financial aid are important academic preparation is another significant factor involved in college preparation. According to Gewertz (2010), "students from some racial and ethnic minority groups and those from low income families enroll in college and succeed at lower rates than their white, wealthier peers" (p. 1). Gewertz (2010) suggested that if

teenagers are properly prepared for college during high school, those gaps close significantly. A study entitled “Mind the Gaps” was done by America College Testing (ACT) in Iowa City. ACT’s study indicated that taking a “strong core curriculum in high school and meeting benchmark scores in all four subjects of the ACT college entrance exam enhances students chances of enrolling in college, persisting there for a second year, earning good grades, and obtaining a two or four year degree” (Gewertz , 2010, p. 1).

Most college preparation programs are aware of how important it is to academically prepare students for college. One program in particular is called Upward Bound. This program provides underrepresented minority students with supplemental instructions and the opportunity to attend academically challenging classes on college campuses during their summer programs (Bergerson, 2009). Aileen, a minority who became a first generation college student, attended an Upward Bound program on a college campus near her home in New Jersey the summer after her junior year of high school (Cushman, 2005). When she was asked about the program she stated:

“It was free, and I decided to go just to see the experience. We stayed on a campus for three weeks, but we came home on Thursday and went back on Sunday evenings. We took college classes in critical thinking, public speaking, English, and math. If you passed the class, you would get college credit, but if you didn’t, you just went there. They gave us two or three hours tutoring, so we could do all our homework, and went to events. It was a good experience” (Cushman, 2005, p. 29).

This experience underscores how the Upward Bound program prepared Aileen for college. By taking college classes the program not only prepared Aileen for college, the program also put Aileen a few steps ahead because she was able to receive college credit.

Two other programs that incorporate an emphasis on academic preparedness are Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) and Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI). Underprivileged students participate in programs where they take classes intended to improve their study and technological skills, and both groups are enrolled in college preparatory

classes. AVID students take Advanced Placement and honors courses in their high schools, and NAI students enroll in courses taught at the University of Southern California (Bergerson, 2009). Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, and Siegle (2008) performed a study that evaluated the effectiveness of AVID services. The researchers used a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effect of the AVID program on a number of criterion variables using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (Black, et. al, 2008). The researchers used three schools in their study, two schools were randomly assigned to the treatment condition, and the third was designated as the comparison school (Black, et. al, 2008). “AVID was associated with an increase in English (language arts), self-concept and with superior grades in language arts and performance on the sixth-grade standardized mastery test in writing” (Black, et. al, 2008, p.121). Parents of AVID’s students involved in this study stated through surveys, high levels of satisfaction with the AVID program; they witnessed improvement in their children’s academic habits, and expectations for their students’ academic success (Black, et. al, 2008). These improvements indicated the effectiveness of AVID services; these improvements will also help academically prepare students for the college.

David Conley, professor and director of the Research Center for Educational Policy at the University of Oregon has done a large amount of research related to preparing minority students for college. Conley reports that, “minority students have to have strong academic bases and that teachers who teach minority students have to understand it’s not good enough to give good grades, which may be reflective of doing well in that environment. Students have to be challenged to really achieve in key areas” (Dolan, 2007, p. 28). These key areas include English, mathematics, science, and social studies. This aligns with the college preparation programs discussed previously.

Buckley (2010) believes mathematics plays a critical role in determining students' and the nation's future. He also believes the US needs to improve the resources given to students of color so that they can maintain a competitive edge. Dolan (2007) believes students' need to be challenged in four key areas, but Buckley (2010) believes more of a focus needs to be put on mathematics. Buckley stated, "if students are to obtain a mathematics education that prepares them for college and, economic and democratic participation, then that education must comprise a curriculum rigorous enough to require them to take more advanced mathematics courses" (Buckley, 2010, p. 75). Buckley (2010) believes mathematics not only prepares underrepresented students for college, but it also prepares them for economic and democratic participation. Buckley (2010) thinks it is important to focus on mathematics when preparing students for college because underrepresented students are experiencing lower levels of achievement in mathematics than their peers. Buckley said, "despite the critical role mathematics plays in young people's educational lives, students of color and students from lower SES backgrounds have been routinely denied adequate instruction and learning experiences in the subject" (Buckley, 2010, p. 51)

America College Testing (ACT) actually defines a college-ready curriculum as four years of English, and at least three years of mathematics, science, and social studies. Conley stated that "these state assessment structures create the potential for closer connections between high school and college, but only if the exams are aligned with college success standards" (Dolan, 2007, p. 28). The "Mind the Gaps" study found that college ready scores on the ACT exam correlated with earning good grades in entry level, credit-bearing college courses. The Iowa City state exam appears to be aligned with these college success standards.

In 2010 less than one-quarter of the students in Iowa City met those benchmarks in all four subject areas of the exam; this shows that more preparation needs to be done. The “Mind the Gaps” findings are useful for this study because it shows that a strong college-ready curriculum adequately prepares low income minority students for college. The ACT’s definition of a college-ready curriculum is valuable for this study because it gives a list of classes that needs to be taken in high school in order to be successful in college. More states need to have college-ready curriculums because there is often a disconnect between what high school students are required to know for graduation and college requirements, both courses and tests students take (Dolan, 2007). A college-ready curriculum can increase low income minority students academic preparedness.

Perna (2005) argued that academic preparation is very important for low income minority students. Perna (2005) also argued that an “accurate definition of academic preparation describes the quality and quantity of courses taken” (p. 117). According to Perna (2005), subject areas that have the most impact on college attendance are math, science, and foreign language. He included a subject different from other researchers, which is foreign language. Perna (2005), Conley (2007), Buckley (2010), and ACT would all agree that science and math are the key subject areas which play an important role in academic preparation. But, students not only have to be prepared academically, they also need access to information necessary for college planning and strategies.

Information necessary for college planning and strategies

Both academic preparation and college planning will prepare underrepresented students prior to enrolling in a higher education. Academic preparation is essential however; college planning may be just as essential. Low income minority students need access to information about higher education and strategies to use that information to reach educational goals. There

are many preparation programs that provide information necessary for college planning and strategies for using that information. For example, Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), Upward Bound, and Puente are a few programs that provide these services. These preparation programs help minority students' ability to process information related to college (Bergerson, 2009). I Have A Dream (IHAD) is a college preparation program that uses sponsors and parents to assist students in gathering and processing information related to college (Bergerson, 2009). These services that help students plan for college are important because two high school students can have similar achievement and aspiration levels, but the one who lacks college planning is less likely to attend or complete college (Somers, 2002 & Tierney, 2005). Timing is also essential to college planning. Students who have families that are engaged in earlier and informed about college planning have higher college aspirations and attendance, especially students who rely on financial aid (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera, et. Al, 2006 & Goldrick-Rab, 2007).

According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice consists of three stages in which families form college aspirations (predisposition stage), collect information about college attendance (search stage), and make decisions about and arrangements for college attendance (choice stage). Activities that have to do with college planning are usually located in the search stage. Something that is important in all three stages is parental involvement, especially in the search stage. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Plank and Jordan (2001) both stated that one specific form of parental involvement that plays an important role in preparing students for college is communication. Communication between the student and parent is crucial to college preparation and enrollment. But, some parents do not know how to communicate with their children about preparing for the college process because they did not attend college. Low income

minority students are often times the first person in their family to go to college. Niema Jordan is a first generation minority student who attended an urban high school. Her high school did not have enough college counselors to help all of the students. So, she set out to look for answers and determined which colleges would make a good match for her (Cushman, 2005). She reported,

“I didn’t have a big sister or brother or even a cousin to go to and say, “What did you do in order to get in?” So I read other people’s accounts in books. I looked at the admissions websites for different colleges. Maybe you have an ideal college in mind-that’s where some people start out. I know people who were like, “I want to go to an Ivy League.” So they went online and researched all the requirements, and that’s how they planned out their high school career. For me, it wasn’t necessarily that I wanted to get into a certain school. I just wanted to get into college. Things don’t always fall in your lap; you know what I’m saying? Like, everybody’s not searching you out. Everybody’s not looking for you. You have to take the initiative” (Cushman, 2005, p. 17).

This statement reveals that some low income minority students plan for college by themselves because their family members are not knowledgeable about the process and because certain urban schools lack resources that help students plan for college. However Niema did not let these obstacles hold her back and overcame them by taking responsibility for her future. She was determined and empowered, yet if she had assistance; the process may have been smoother.

Family members are not the only people who can help low income minority students plan for college. High school guidance counselors and mentors can also help students prepare for college. Hartford, CT has a program called Career Beginnings that was established in 1986. This program helps students plan for college. Career Beginnings provides counseling, mentors, and twenty workshops that prepare high school juniors and seniors for college and the admission process (Druckman, 2007). The colleges involved in this program are Capital community College, Central Connecticut State University, Charter Oak State College, Godwin College, Hartford Seminary, Rensselaer at Hartford, Saint Joseph College, Saint Thomas Seminary, Trinity College, University of Connecticut, and University of Hartford. All of these colleges are

located in Connecticut and they work independently with the Hartford Public Schools.

Druckman (2007) provided the programs mission in his article, “its mission is to increase the number of students graduating from high school, attending college, and establishing successful careers” (Druckman, 2007, p. 43). The results of this program have been consistently strong over the years, but the consortium’s experiences in the schools suggested that all students, not just upperclassmen in high school, needed more information and guidance about higher education opinions earlier in their school years (Druckman, 2007). One of the reasons why Career Beginnings results have been consistently strong over the years is because it provides mentoring.

Mentors are able to “monitor and assess at-risk student engagement in school and provide individual intervention and support” (Wasburn-Moses & Statt, 2012). During individual interventions with students who are slacking, academically mentors can explain to the student why it is important for them to do well in school and how being successful in high school will increase their chances of getting accepted to a college (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). Mentors have the ability to empower students and show them that going to college is an obtainable goal; for example in Wasburn-Moses & Statt (2012) study they tested the effectiveness of mentor-student relationship and one of the students who was being mentored in this study said, “I didn't used to want to go to college, but now I do.” This statement shows the effect mentors can have on low-income minority students.

Mentors are often times young adults who are still in college or recently graduated from college. The fact that they are younger sometimes makes it easier to connect with students especially if the mentor and the student come from similar backgrounds (Wasburn-Moses & Statt, 2012). Mentors can help students plan for college by helping the student figure out colleges that fit the student best. Applying to college can be confusing and difficult, but mentors

should be able to assist students during the process. Their assistance can be beneficial because they have experience with the process so they are knowledgeable about the process. College visitations also play an important factor in trying to decide which college to apply to or attend if the student has already been accepted. When young first generation minority students begin to tour campuses their mentors can explain how college works (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). More specifically, mentors can explain, “college class schedules, lifestyles in the residential halls and dining halls, and student athletic facilities” (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011, p.89). Mentors are not the only people who can help prepare students for college; counselors can also provide information necessary for college planning and strategies for using that information.

High school counselors can play a vital role in preparing students for college. Student access to school counselors is a critical link in the college preparation process that includes information about college, help with selecting colleges to apply to, and help with the application process (Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2007; McDonough, 2005). Research indicates that high school counselors have an enormous influence on the college plans of minority students (McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) used a social capital theoretical framework and a national longitudinal sample of high school seniors in the United States to investigate the effects of students' contact with school counselors for college information. The researcher studied the effects of the number of school counselors in a school and student-counselor contact for college information on students' college application rates when considered among other college related variables (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). These researchers' findings indicated that student-counselor contact for college information is a significant positive predictor of applying to college (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). But, schools in urban areas that have a large

amount of minority students are least likely to have school counselors, more likely to have less well-trained counselors, and most likely to have counselors who are forced to give up college counseling for other non-counseling-related tasks (McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colyar (2004) suggested that counselors in schools serving more minority students have higher student-counselor ratios, receive fewer resources toward college planning and preparation, and operate under a limited school wide emphasis on college access. These authors are in agreement that some low income minority students receive fewer resources toward college planning preparation for a variety of different reasons. Some low income minority students are receiving a sufficient amount of information about planning for college and are academically prepared for college, but they are unable to go to college because of financial reasons.

Financial Support

Financial aid and financial planning is one of the most important parts of the college preparation process. Corwin, Colyar, and Tierney (2005) study highlighted the negative impact a lack of information about financing for college can have on low income minority students' enrollment patterns. Corwin, Colyar, and Tierney (2005) also mentioned that low income minority students and their families need more information regarding the eventual returns on the investment of a college education. This focus reflects other researchers' concerns about labor market perceptions' negatively influencing enrollment decisions for students who are minorities (Mickelson, 1990 & Perna, 2006).

There are college preparation programs that understand the importance of providing low income minority students with information related to financial planning and have services that incorporate financial coaching. For example, IHAD provides students with the financial

resources necessary to attend college, and NAI offers a financial incentive to students who attend the University of Southern California (Bergerson, 2009). The University of Nebraska has a similar but, different program called the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy. This program financially supports first-generation students (Bergerson, 2009).

The University of Nebraska has two campuses, Lincoln and Kearney. Both of these campuses form partnership with local high schools to accept promising students as early as ninth grade to intensive college preparatory programs each year (Chau, 2012). Students who are participating in this program have to maintain a 3.0 grade-point average if they are in Lincoln's program and a 2.85 grade-point average if they are in Kearney's program (Chau, 2012). Chau (2012) stated that, "If they get into either Lincoln or Kearny, the universities will meet without loans any financial need not covered by federal Pell Grants and outside scholarships" (Chau, 2012, p. 2). In other words, both universities will make sure the student is not paying anything out of pocket for college. One of the reasons why this program is remarkable is because it rewards first-generation students by covering the cost of college. Often times first generation students have the grades to get accepted into a college, but are unable to go to college because they do not have enough money. The services that the Lincoln program provides are similar to the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education because they both provide counseling, tutoring, peer mentoring, and gives tours (Chau, 2012 & Druckman, 2009). The biggest differences between these two programs is that the University of Nebraska program provides support services for four consecutive years, tracks the student's progress, and provides financial support (Chau, 2012). Amber Hunter, director of the University of Nebraska program said, "students need to be fully prepared all around before going to college" (Chau, 2012, p. 2). This program is preparing students as much as possible by providing as many facets of supports as possible. The

programs support and effort is working because Chau (2012) discovered that, “over the past six years, the college-prep program has admitted about 300 students. Fifty-five of 64 high-school graduates have made it to the university, where the furthest along are now sophomores” (Chau, 2012, p. 2).

Every minority student will not receive a scholarship that will cover the cost of college; therefore families who can save money for their child’s education should begin saving as soon as possible. Holmes (2012) stated that, “parents must be practical and strategic in the college financing process, weighing both costs and benefits” (Holmes, 2012, p. 57). Bergerson (2009) agrees with this statement and he strongly believes parental involvement plays a huge role in educational planning and that parents should be knowledgeable about the benefits and cost of higher education as well as the resources available to help defray those costs (Bergerson, 2009). Holmes (2012) provided an example of how the parents of two children decided to save for their children’s education:

Patricia Robert-Rose and her husband, Gene, started off setting aside \$50 per month for their daughters, Amaya and Aliya, when they were born (Holmes, 2012). Fourth-three year old Roberts-Rose said "Today, we deposit \$100 per month for each child" (Holmes, 2012, p. 57). The Roses already have \$16,000 saved for 10-year-old Amaya and about \$9,000 for 7-year-old Aliya. The Roses started saving early for their children’s education; this strategy will help them save a sufficient amount of money for their children education (Holmes, p. 57, 2012).

This is an example of a great strategy, but some low income families are unable to save one hundred dollars a month because they do not have enough financial stability. Some low income minorities who have the grades to get into college do not apply because they think that they cannot afford college (Holmes, 2012). But, there is financial aid and scholarships available for low income minority students. It is the duty of college preparation programs, mentor, and high school counselors’ to provide financial planning and help with the financial aid application

process (Bergerson, 2012; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011; Hawkins & Clinedinst, 2007 & McDonough, 2005).

Conclusion

Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that there are resources available and methods that can help prepare low income minority students for college. The reviewed studies indicate that, academic preparation, information about planning, and financial strategies can proficiently prepare low minority students for college. If low income minority students are unprepared they can potentially struggle once they make it to college and/or drop out of college because they were not given the proper knowledge or taught the proper skills needed to be successful in college. It is imperative to reiterate the importance of the role that schools, college preparation programs, and parental involvement plays. It is also clear that college preparation extends beyond information and help with completing college applications. Academic preparation, skills development, mentoring, and financial assistance are all essential components of effective college preparation programs. Schools and programs that can address most if not all of these components will have the greatest impact on addressing the many barriers standing in the way of postsecondary education for low income minority students.

If low income minority students are in fact struggling their freshmen year further investigation should focus on their struggles. This study will explore low income minority students' perceptions of whether or not they felt academically prepared for college their freshmen year. The participants' responses were compared to information found in the literature reviewed.

Methodology

This was a descriptive, qualitative study which focused on the academic struggles and success of low income minority students. Through the interview process, this study investigated students' perceptions of whether they felt academically prepared to be a student at a medium size Catholic college in the Northeast. This study also investigated whether participants had to make academic adjustments in college and their financial struggles.

Subjects

The participants in this study were selected using snowball sampling. First the researcher interviewed two low income minority students who are currently in college. The first two interviews were with participants the researcher knew; at the end of the interview the researcher asked both participants if they knew students who fit the criteria of this study. Then the researcher interviewed the students that the first two participants suggested. This procedure was repeated until a total of 8 participants completed the interviews.

Data Gathering

The participants in this study were interviewed privately and asked about 12 questions. The questions were demographic questions, college preparation questions, and their college experience. An example of one of the questions that was asked included: "What were some of your biggest struggles freshmen year?" (See Appendix B for questions that were asked during the interviews.) The interviews were recorded using a media recorder and the recordings were destroyed once the data was transcribed. The recordings were stored in a locked cabinet. One of the researcher's goals was to interview at least two minority students from each year of college.

Data Analysis

The data in this study was analyzed by finding patterns or similar themes in the participants' stories and responses. The researcher found out whether or not more students felt prepared or unprepared. The researcher also let participants know what the literature was saying about proficient ways to prepare students for college. The researcher asked the participants if they agreed with the literature and if they used some of the resources that were mentioned in literature related to college preparation.

Findings

In this descriptive, qualitative study eight participants were asked questions that allowed them to discuss their academic struggles and success in college. The participants in this study shared stories related to their perceptions of whether they felt academically prepared their freshmen year of college. The participants in this study also discussed academic adjustments they had to make their freshmen year of college and their financial struggles. Four of the participants were female, four were male. All of the participants were full time students at a medium size catholic college in the Northeast. Three participants were freshmen, two were sophomores, and three were seniors. Four participants attended a college preparatory high school, two attended a private high school, and two attended a public high school. Participants identified themselves as Haitian, Jamaican, West Indian, African American, and Black. Participants were minorities with household annual incomes of \$50,000 or less fitting the criteria of this study.

A majority of the participants in this study did not know a lot about college their first two years of high school. Most stated that during their first two years of high school they defined college based off what they saw in movies and on television. When the participants were asked about their perceptions of college four mentioned something to do with partying while two

reported college was not an option until they became a junior in high school. Most of the participants in this study started preparing for college their junior year for a number of different reasons. The reasons the participants mentioned included: maturity, became aware of the importance of college, realized college was an option for them after high school, wanted to follow in the footsteps of their siblings, began visiting colleges, and attended a college prep workshop.

The participants were asked a series of questions to discuss their transition from high school to a predominantly white college, their perceptions about college, and their preparation process. Several themes emerged while they discussed their transitions from high school to college. These included support systems, lack of financial support, academic struggles in the course, Development of Western Civilization (DWC), change in study habits, lack of parental involvement in the preparation process, and culture shock.

Support systems

Most of the participants in this study were first generation students and mentioned that they received motivational support from their parents, staff members (teachers, principals, guidance counselors) at their school, siblings or all three. The participants in this study did not receive much information about college from their parents because their parents did not attend college. Six out of eight students mentioned that their parents were motivational during their transition from high school to college. A male freshmen student explained, "I was learning about the college process and teaching my parents at the same time. My parents were not very informative when it came to college, but they were very motivational." Whereas a female freshman noticed that her mother to be very motivational during her transition from high school to college and stressed the importance of college by placing her daughter in a college preparatory

high school. One of the males, a senior, stated that his mother also played a huge role in the preparation process. He mentioned that his mother did not know much about college but was “very motivational” and pushed him since day one. He also revealed that he used to misbehave his freshmen and sophomore year in high school and that he changed his behavior after he had a motivational discussion with his high school principle. During this discussion his principal said, “I think you have great potential that you have yet to discover,” he also promised him that he would clear his record if he got his act together. The participant said, “That discussion I had with my principle had a lasting effect on me, and it made me realize that I was capable of doing better, so I started working harder in high school.” Some of the participants in this study received motivational support from teachers and their guidance counselor. Many of the students in this study mentioned that teachers and guidance counselors provided them with information and tools needed to be successful in college. One of the participant’s high school English teacher told him to take advantage of resources at college that would help him be successful and to not be afraid to ask for help.

Four of the participants in this study attended college preparatory high school. One of the participants who attended a college preparatory high school said, “All of the staff members at my school were helpful during the college preparation process. They stressed the importance of college and were very motivational.” All of the participants in this study received some type of support from their high school guidance counselor. For most of the students in this study, their guidance counselor played a significant role in their college preparation process. Participants mentioned that their guidance counselor provided information about college and helped the participants in this study find colleges that were best fits. The participants mentioned that their

guidance counselors helped them find colleges that were affordable, apply for scholarships, apply for financial aid, and apply to college.

Three participants mentioned that they received additional support from individuals who were not their parents and were not staff members at their high school. Two students said that they received important information about college from one of their family members. One of these participants stated that her older brother was extremely helpful during the college preparation process. She said, “He went through the process, so, I was able to ask him questions about the process, I could not ask my parents because they never attended.” The other participant who received additional support from a family member mentioned that he received support from his sister. He said she was a freshman in college when he began applying to college. He told me that she was really busy with college, but was able to answer questions related to financial aid and shared her college experience with him. This same participant also said he was one of his biggest support systems during the college preparation process. He said,

“I became interested in college my junior year of high school. I became mature and realized how important college was. I started researching information about a bunch of different colleges, and looked for a bunch of different scholarships. I was very self-motivated; I wanted to go to college and made it happen.”

Only one of the participants mentioned that she attended a college preparation program. The college prep program that she attended was called College Readiness. The program she attended helped her develop a resume and apply to colleges that she had a high chance of getting accepted based on the college’s GPA requirements. College Readiness also helped her write supplemental essays, fill out the common application, and complete her Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This program was extremely helpful and provided her with the essentials she needed to be successful in college. In sum all of the students had at least one support system

during the college preparation process. But, once the students in this study began college they encountered some different set of issues.

Lack of Financial Support

All of the participants mentioned the lack of financial support was a serious issue their freshmen year of college. Every participant except for two obtained a job or work-study to pay for books, school supplies, their tuition, and fun activities. One freshman female student said, “I did not realize how poor I was until I came to college. What might seem like nothing to them is a lot to me.” Another participant also commented on his financial struggles. A senior male participant said,

“There were times freshmen year, when I asked my mother for money and she told me that she did not have it. It was very frustrating because I could not go certain places with my friends freshmen year because of my financial situation, so I decided to take on the burden and became a RA. I knew being a RA would be time consuming, but at least I now have my own money, to do things that involve money.”

He also said, “I never knew college was going to involve so much money, I knew it cost a lot to go to college, but I did not know I was going to need money for so many different things.” The two participants who did not struggle financially their freshmen year were both current freshmen, and said that they were not struggling financially because they applied for multiple scholarships in high school and received a lot of outside scholarships. A freshmen male who said he did not struggle financially because he had outside scholarships also said, “I think I would have struggled financially if I did not receive all of these scholarships.”

Academic Struggles

Not only did most of the participants struggle financially, most of the participants also struggled academically. One reason why the participants in this study struggled academically was because of their time management skills. Seven out of the eight participants said they had to

learn how to manage their time once they got to college. A participant who is a senior said, “I was alone on my own. I could do my homework whenever I felt like doing my homework. I was a really big procrastinator, and I did not break this habit until I noticed that my grades were suffering because of this bad habit.” He was not the only one who mentioned procrastination while talking about academic struggles. Five people in total said they were procrastinators during their freshmen year and that it had a negative effect on their grades. Only one student said she did not struggle academically freshmen year. This participant was a freshman from Jamaica and she moved to the United States when she was 13. This participant felt prepared for her freshmen year because her former years of education prior to entering the US. She attended grades K-8 in Jamaica and moved to the United States and attended a public high school in New Haven, CT and said,

“The education I was receiving in high school was a joke compare to Jamaica. Jamaica takes education a lot more serious than America. The school system in Jamaica is a lot more rigorous, and they expect a lot more than the high school I went to. I kept the same work ethic that I needed to be successful in Jamaica, throughout high school and while in college, so this is why I am not struggling.”

The two participants in this study who attended a public high school went to different high schools in New Haven, CT. Unlike the other participant who attended a public high school, he did, in fact, struggle. He revealed that he did not know how to study freshmen year, especially for Development of Western Civilization which is a class students at this medium size Catholic college in the Northeast are required to take their freshmen and sophomore year for four semesters. This participant stated, “I didn’t have to study in high school. All I had to do was memorize the material in high school, and the material was not Catholic material because I did not go to a Catholic school. My grades suffered because of my lack of preparation for this class.” He also went on to say, “It seemed as though the teachers expected us to know certain things that

were Catholic related. I didn't know these certain things, but I felt like everyone around me did." This participant was not the only participant that mentioned he had to change his studying habits freshmen year. Four participants in total said they had to change their study habits. A freshmen and a sophomore participant said they felt somewhat academically prepared for DWC because they learned most of the material in high school. Both of these participants said they were not completely prepared because of the workload. Six participants in total said they were not prepared for the workload.

Culture Shock

Just about all of the participants struggled adjusting academically their freshmen year, but all of the participants did in fact struggled socially. The reason why the participants in this study struggled adjusting socially was because this college was a huge culture shock for them. Six participants said they went to high school where Blacks and Hispanics were the majority and Whites were the minority. A female freshman in this study who went to a high school where Blacks and Hispanics were the majority said, "I knew college was going to be less diverse, but I did not think college was going to lack this much diversity. I was not prepared for this and I am still adjusting to this new environment." A freshmen female said, "I felt like an outsider last semester. I used to be a part of the majority; now I am a minority. The White students were not very welcoming and I felt like I did not belong, sometimes I still feel like I do not belong, I would transfer, but I can't turn down the money this college is giving me." Two male seniors said the lack of diversity at this medium size Catholic college in the Northeast has affected their academic performance negatively their freshmen year. While reflecting on his freshmen year, one of the senior male students said,

"I used to sit in class freshmen year and say to myself, why isn't there anyone else that looks like me in class? I was afraid to raise my hand freshmen year because I did not

want to give the wrong answer to a question or ask a dumb question. I didn't want my white peers to think I was dumb and did not belong in college. My class participation grades were extremely low freshmen year.”

This college's lack of diversity had a negative effect on all of the participants in this study. The lack of diversity made it difficult for the low income minority students in this study to adjust academically and socially. The upperclassmen in this study stated that they adjusted to the environment yet, all of the freshmen stated that they are currently trying to adjust to this new setting.

Summary and Implications

This study explored whether low income minority students at a Catholic institution struggled academically their freshmen year. If a participant did in fact struggle academically their freshmen year this study attempted to understand, through interviews the reasons why they struggled. This qualitative study discovered how some low income minority students at a Catholic college prepared for college while in high school. All of the participants in this study struggled their freshmen year, whether it was academically, financially, adjusting socially, or all three.

There were eight participants interviewed in this study and snowball sampling was used to gather participants. Although the study produced a small sample of participants, it was diverse and provided valuable information about the experience of minority students entering a college setting.

A majority of the participants in this study did not know a lot about college their first two years of high school. This may be partially explained by the participants' high schools lacking resources regarding college preparation and planning. This is supported by the literature which reveals that counselors who work at high schools in non-affluent areas are sometimes forced to

give up college counseling for other issues within the school, such as behavior issues (McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

High schools in low income areas tend to lack trained school counselors and usually have one or two guidance counselors for the entire school. Guidance counselors who work at high schools that do not have a sufficient number of counselors usually do not begin preparing students for college until they become a junior or senior. One of the reasons why guidance counselors at high schools in low income areas wait until the students are about to transition to college is because it is impossible for the guidance counselors at these types of schools to prepare students in every grade (McDonough, 2005). The student to counselor ratio is too high, so schools in non-affluent areas usually focus their attention on students who are juniors and seniors and have the potential to go to college. Participants in this study did not indicate the lack of counselors, but the interviews revealed that most participants did not receive information about college until their junior year of high school. Research indicates that low income minority students who began preparing for college early are often more successful than students who begin preparing their junior or senior year of high school (Druckman, 2007). Some students in this study mentioned that college was not an option their first two years of high school. One participant said, "I thought I was going to graduate from high school and then get a job." High schools with low income minorities should try to prepare their students for college as early as possible to increase their student's chances of going to college and being successful once they get to college. Early college preparation can show young minority students the benefits of going to college and that college can be an option once they graduate from high school. Early college preparation can also empower students and motivate them to do well in high school. High

schools with more minority students and fewer resources should also establish positive supports systems to provide a smoother transition from high school to college.

All of the participants in this study mentioned at least one support system while discussing their transitions from high school to college. They received motivational support from staff and family members or both. Essentially someone who believed in them. Most of the participants in this study were first generation students and did not receive information about college from their parents. Although their parents had not attended college, they still stressed its importance. Six out of eight participants mentioned that their parents were motivational during their transition from high school to college. This was supported by the research where families who are engaged in their son or daughter's college preparation process had higher college aspirations and attendance (Bergerson, 2009; Cabera, et. a al, 2006 & Goldrick-Rab, 2007).

The motivational support participants in this study received from their parents was very helpful during the participants' college preparation process. After reviewing findings related to motivational support from parents, the researcher discovered that the participants did not specifically say what the parents did to be motivational. The researcher did not prompt the participants for further understanding of how parents were motivational. This is one limitation of the study, where inquiring in more detail may have provided a deeper understanding of what parents said and did to provide support. Parents were not the only family members who played an important role in the transition process from high school to college. Two participants stated that their older siblings were very helpful during the process as well.

Older siblings who have already gone through the transition process played an important role in preparing their younger brother or sister for college. Older siblings who attended or who are currently attending college while their younger sibling is preparing for college proved to be a

helpful resource. The information younger siblings in this study received from their older siblings made these participants knowledgeable about the college preparation process and prepared them for issues that might occur while they are in college.

In this study a participant shared a story about how he was very self-motivated during the college preparation process. He did not wait for individuals to give him information about college. This participant researched information about different colleges and different scholarships on his own. He knew college was expensive, but he was determined to find as many scholarships as possible because he wanted to go to school for a very low price. The story that this male freshmen shared was similar to a story noted by Cushman (2005, p. 17), in that both of the schools these low income minorities attended were in urban areas and lack resources. They were both very aware of this obstacle and overcame this obstacle by taking responsibility for their future.

Staff members who work with this population should remain optimistic and hopeful because their interactions with students in this population can have a lasting effect. One senior in this study reported how motivated and empowered he felt because his principal believed in him. The participant used to misbehave early in high school but a meaningful discussion with his principal made a difference. He reported: "My principal made me realize that I was capable of doing better, so I started working harder in high school." This finding was powerful because it highlights the positive effect a staff member can have on low income high school students.

Some high schools with a high percent of low income students have a hard time with providing support from their guidance counselors to all of their students. But, the findings in this study found that all of the participants in this study received some type of support from their high school guidance counselor. The participants' high school guidance counselors played a

significant role in their college preparation process. The findings related to the guidance counselor support in this study were similar to information found by Hawkins and Clinedunst (2007). Hawkins and Clinedunst (2007) indicated that student access to school counselors is a critical link in the college preparation process. The participants in this study received information about college from their guidance counselors. The participants' guidance counselors also helped with selecting colleges to apply to, and helped with the application process. The participants' guidance counselors had a positive impact on the college plans of the participants who were in this study.

Only one participant mentioned she attended a college preparation program called College Readiness. The college preparation program this participant attended provided key services that helped adequately prepare low income minority students for college. Some of the services received were similar to the services of the college preparation programs in Bergerson (2009). The researchers noticed none of the participants indicated that mentors were a part of their college preparation process. This finding was shocking, but it seems as though two of the participants' older siblings were mentors because they were able to provide assistance to their younger siblings during their transition process.

Lack of financial support was a serious issue for every participant in this study. None of the participants mentioned that they saved money in high school for college related expenses. Most of the participants knew it was expensive to attend college, but they were unaware of the financial demands on them once they began college. The expenses participants were not aware of included: books, supplies, events at school, and hanging out with friends. Participants began to realize their low economic status their freshmen year of college. Every participant except two obtained a job on campus or off campus to pay for college related expenses. The participants

could not simply ask their parents for money whenever they needed it like some of their wealthy white peers. Working while in college can be extremely difficult to do. It can be time consuming and can interfere with the time a students' studying or completing homework. None of the participants who obtained a job freshmen specifically indicated that their job negatively affected their academic perform, but participants who had jobs indicated that they struggled academically their freshmen year because of their poor time management skills.

Most of the participants who struggled with time management learned how to manage their time freshmen year. The researcher did not ask the participants what specific adjustments were made. This was another limitation of the study, where inquiring in more detail may have provided a deeper understanding of adjustments that were made by participants their freshmen that helped them become academically successful in college. Participants in this study also mentioned that they struggled academically because of procrastination. This had a negative effect on their grades.

Every participant in this study did not struggle academically their freshmen year. One participant who was born and raised in Jamaica and moved to United States when she was 13 indicated she felt academically prepared because of the education she received while in Jamaica. This female participant shared an interesting story about her educational experience in Jamaica. The education she received at a public high school in New Haven, CT was not challenging for her. She said, "The school system in Jamaica is a lot more rigorous, and they expect a lot more than the high school I went to." This statement can make some people wonder whether or not staff members who work at high schools in urban areas in the United States are pushing their students to their full potential. This participant thinks she would have struggled academically in college if she did not maintain the same work ethic she used in Jamaica.

Some of the participants who struggled academically had to change their study habits freshmen year. One of the participants stated he did not study in high school. It seems as though the class work his high school was giving him was not challenging. He was able to be academically successful in high school by using a strategy that would not be effective in college. These studying habits developed in high school did not prepare him for college. In order for someone to be successful in college they usually have to study and put forth effort into their school work. The freshmen participants in this study were adjusting to this college's rigorous curriculum and the upperclassmen made modifications, which contributed to their academic success.

This study also revealed that the low income minority students in this study struggled adjusting socially at this Catholic institution. The college the participants attended was a predominately white school. College was a huge culture shock for most of the participants. The lack of diversity on this College's campus affected the students negatively. Most of the participants went to high schools with a majority of Hispanics and African American students. At this college the participants felt like the "minority." The participants in this study are aware of the lack of diversity at this college and it took the upperclassmen some time to adjust to this new environment freshmen year. The freshmen stated that they were currently adjusting to the new environment. A freshmen female said she felt like an outsider. She felt like she did not belong. One of the reasons why she felt like she did not belong is because she felt like most of the white students were not welcoming. This finding can make some people wonder, what is this college doing to make multicultural students feel welcome because going to a school that has a large majority of students who do not look like you can be intimidating. Lack of diversity can make multicultural students who come from a background that incorporates very little interaction with

individuals from other races uncomfortable. One participant mentioned that the lack of diversity at this college affected his confidence in the classroom. In the story this participant shared he mentioned he did not participate in class his freshmen year because he did not want his white peers to perceive him as dumb. The story that this participant shared indicated that lack of diversity can have a negative impact on some low income minority student's self-esteem. White students at this college most likely do not question whether or not they belong because they can look at other students in their class and outside of class and see a lot of students that look like them. The participants in this study are often times the only or one of the few African Americans in their class. The college in this study is currently trying to diversify the student, staff, and faculty community, which is a great idea because this study shows that the lack of diversity at this school is negatively affecting minority students.

Recommendations

This study's findings can be useful for high school and college counselors, teachers, administrators and family members of students who work with low income minority students. This study gives individuals a better understanding of low income minority students' perceptions of college. This study also highlights low income minority students' freshmen experiences at a predominately white college. Administrators at this college can use this information to develop a more effective ways to help low income minority students transition from high school to college more smoothly. Administrators at this college should consider sending local high schools with a large number of minority students, information about how to prepare for college academically and financially. Administrators should also send tips and advice related to college preparation to high schools where this college has accepted multiple students from. This college usually accepts low income minority students who attend a high school that is close to the college or students

from a high school where this college has accepted someone in the past. It is important for this college to help high schools where they accept a high percent of their low income minority students prepare for college. If this college was to provide information packets for these high schools, this could provide the staff members at these high schools a better understanding of what is needed in order to be successful at their college. By helping these high schools prepare low income minority students for colleges it may increase their opportunities to be successful academically.

High schools with low income minority students also play an important role in preparing these types of students for college. This population is an underrepresented population in college for a number of different reasons. One of the main reasons is because this population usually encounters many obstacles while in high school. The staff members at schools with a large number of low income minorities should help students overcome obstacles and be involved in the college preparation process. Evidence in this study and previous studies showed that their involvement is very important.

High schools with a lack of college preparation resources should try and figure out a way to strengthen their resources. In order for a high school in an urban area to strengthen their resources, it will likely cost a sufficient amount of money, which is something most high schools in urban areas do not have. It is difficult for some low income minority students to be inspired about college because they do not see how valuable college can be. The staff members at schools that have a majority of low income students should be very involved in the college preparation process. Evidence in this study and previous studies indicated that their involvement is very important.

Implications

Many questions surfaced while interviewing the participants. Further studies could more deeply inquire about participants' experiences academically and socially. The researcher felt biased due to his own similar experience, which may have impacted the interview process.

The findings in this study can provide future research about how minority students prepare for college and who is usually the most influential during this process. An area that could be further explored based on this research is the adjustments low income minority students have to make in order to be successful in college. Future research studies could include a larger sample size and a more diverse group of participants. There is still a lot of research that needs to be done on the topic of college preparation for low-income minority students. Future research studies need to conduct similar studies on a larger scale. Hopefully one day low income minority students will be more prepared for college and will no longer be underrepresented students in college.

References

- Bergerson, A. (2009). College preparation programs. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 35(4), 85-97.
- Black, A. C., Little, C. A., McCoach, D., Purcell, J. H., & Siegle, D. (2008). Advancement via individual determination: Method selection in conclusions about program effectiveness. *Journal Of Educational Research*, 102(2), 111-124.
- Bryan, J., Moore-Thomas, C., Day-Vines, N. L., & Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2011). School counselors as social capital: The effects of high school college counseling on college application rates. *Journal Of Counseling & Development*, 89(2), 190-199.
- Buckley, L. A. (2010). Unfulfilled hopes in education for equity: redesigning the mathematics curriculum in a US high school. *Journal Of Curriculum Studies*, 42(1), 51-78.
doi:10.1080/00220270903148065
- Cabrera, Alberto F., Regina Deil-Amen, Radhika Prabhu, Patrick T. Terenzini, Chul Lee, and Robert E. Franklin Jr. (2006). Increasing the college preparedness of at risk students. *Journal of Latinos and Education* 79–97.
- Chau, J. (2012). To guide first-generation students, u. of Nebraska reaches into high schools. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 58(26), A20-A21
- Corwin, Z. B., Colyar, J. E., and Tierney, W. G. (2005). Introduction. Engaging research and practice: Extracurricular and curricular influences on college access. In W. G. Tierney, Z. B. Corwin, and J. E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college. Nine elements of effective outreach*, (pp. 1–9). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Cushman, K. (2005). *First in the family: Advice about college from first-generation students. Providence, Rhode Island: Next Generation Press.*
- Dolan, T. G. (2008). Minority students and college success: challenges and solutions. *Education Digest*, 73(7), 27-30.
- Druckman, R. (2007). Getting on the college track in fifth grade. *New Directions For Higher Education*, (138), 43-49.
- Gewertz, C. (2010). For high-risk groups, success gap in college hinges on readiness. *Education Week*, 30(7), 8.
- Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Deborah F. Carter, and Rachelle W. Wagner. (2007). What higher education has to say about the transition to college. *Teachers College Record* 109, 2444–81.

- Hawkins, D. A., & Clinedinst, M. E. (2007). Alexandria, VA: National association for college admission counseling. *State of college admission*. Retrieved from <http://admin.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/Research/Documents/07StateofAdmission.pdf>
- Holmes, T. E. (2012). The business of college planning. *Black Enterprise*, 43(1), 56-62.
- Hossler, D., and Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three phase model and the implications for policymakers. *College and University*, 62(3), 207–221.
- Luna, D. I. (2006). Is opportunity knocking? Low- income students' perceptions of college and financial aid. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(12), 1670-1686.
- McDonough, P. M. (2005). Counseling and college counseling in America's high schools. Alexandria, VA: NACAC. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org/PublicationsResources/Research/Documents/WhitePaperMcDonough.pdf>
- McDonough, P. M. (2006). The meaning of money perceptual differences between college counselors and low-income families about college costs and financial aid. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(12), 1703-1718.
- Mickelson, R. A. (1990). The attitude-achievement paradox among black adolescents. *Sociology of Education*, 63(1), 44–61.
- Perna, L. W. (2005). The key to college access: Rigorous academic preparation. In W. G. Tierney, Z. B. Corwin, and J. E. Colyar (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*, 113–134. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 99–157. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Plank, S. B., and Jordan, W. J. (2001). Effects of information, guidance, and actions on postsecondary destinations: A study of talent loss. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 947–979.
- Radcliffe, R., & Bos, B. (2011). Mentoring Approaches to create a college-going culture for at-risk secondary level students. *American Secondary Education*, 39(3), 86-107.
- Somers, Patricia, James Cofer, and Jim VanderPutten. (2002). “The early bird goes to college: The link between early college aspirations and postsecondary matriculation.” *Journal of College Student Development*, 93–107.
- Tierney, W. G., & Venegas, K. M. (2004). Addressing financial aid in college preparation

programs. *Boston/Indianapolis: The Education Resources Institute/Lumina Foundation for Education.*

Tierney, William G., Zoe B. Corwin, and Julia E. Colyar, eds. (2005). *Preparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach.* New York: SUNY Press.

Wasburn-Moses, L., & Statt, J. (2012). Campus mentors: A Cte/Higher education partnership. *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers*, 87(4), 36-39.

Appendix A

Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am a social work major at Providence College, inviting you to participate in a study that will examine low income minority students' perceptions of whether or not they felt academically prepared for college their freshmen year. Information about students' perceptions can be useful to those in helping professions such as social work. Data gathered in this study will be reported confidentially in a research paper for use in a social work capstone course at Providence College.

For this study, undergraduate students are being recruited for this research. Participating will interviewed and asked several questions related to their transition to college and their freshmen experience. Each interview will take place in a private setting and will take 45 minutes or less. The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder and the tapes will be destroyed once the data is transcribed.

There are no anticipated significant risks associated with involvement in this research. The nature of these questions may potentially cause minor emotional discomfort or stress. Participants are free to decline participation in this study at any time or decline to answer any questions.

Benefits of participating in this study include contributing to the generation of knowledge that may aid in work with others in the future. There is no other anticipated compensation.

Your responses will be anonymous, that is, information will be collected in a way that cannot be traced back to individual participants.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate or decline to participate will not influence your relationship with the interviewers or the Department of Social Work in any way.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS, AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

NAME (PRINT) _____

SIGNATURE _____

Thank you for participating in this study.

Justin Gilliam (jgillia1@friars.providence.edu)

Appendix B

Qualitative Research Project: Interview Questions

1. What is your nationality? Gender? Grade? Age?
2. What is your household annual income? (If you do not know take an educated guess)
3. What were your perceptions about college before you attended?
4. What were your perceptions/what did you know about college before you came here?
5. How did you do to prepare for college?
6. How involved were your parents in the college preparation process?
7. Who helped you prepare for college and how?
8. What was your transition to college like?
9. Did you feel academically prepared your freshmen year of college?
10. Did you feel financially prepared your freshmen year of college?
11. What were some of your biggest struggles freshmen year? Why did you struggle? Or why did you not struggle? How did you struggle freshmen year?
12. If you could go back to being a student in high school how would prepare for college?