We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting on
Friday, January 13, 2017
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
at the
Hassenfeld Conference Center
Geller Room
Brandeis University
415 South Street
Waltham, MA

Please RSVP by
Friday, January 6, 2017 by email at Lanni@brandeis.edu
or by phone at 781-736-4835

AGENDA

10:00 – 10:15: Welcome and Introductions

10:15 – Noon:
Discussion
Topic: Student Resiliency and Grit
Facilitator: David Drucker, Dean College

Noon – 12:45:
Lunch

12:45 – 1:45:
Round Robin: In the spirit of collective sharing and reflection, we reserve time at each meeting to share new developments on our campuses and in our jobs. It is also a time to discuss personal and professional successes and challenges. The round robin is anchored in a common commitment to empathy, constructive and collegial problem solving, and support in a confidential setting.

1:45 – 2:00:
Reflection on Practice

There has been a great deal of research on the relationship between non-cognitive attributes, such as personality, and achievement. The results of early studies, however, were inconsistent.
The introduction of the Five Factor Model of Personality in the 1980s ushered in a new era for research on links between personality and performance. The model articulates five dimensions of personality: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Of the five traits, conscientiousness, with its relationship to high levels of motivation, ambition, self-control, and the capacity for hard work, consistently predicted academic success, controlling for cognitive measures.¹

More recently, scholars in the field have taken a finer-grained approach to the role of personality traits in academic success. The construct of “grit,” for example, exhibits some of the characteristics of conscientiousness; however, it emphasizes perseverance and the ability to stick to goals over time. Angela Duckworth, a pioneer in this field of study, describes the concept as “working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina.”²

Reporting on results of six studies representing different educational contexts, Duckworth et al. found that grit, though unrelated to measures of intelligence, played a positive role in educational success. In one study, students at an elite university who scored high in grit also achieved higher GPAs than their peers, despite having lower SAT scores.

In addition, findings from two other studies indicate that grittier individuals tend to achieve higher levels of education than their less gritty peers. In addition, the quality of grit may increase over the life span.³ Grit alone, however, does not necessarily predict success in all aspects of life. Duckworth and Gross explain “some gritty and exceptionally successful people are famously undisciplined in life domains other than their chosen passion.”⁴

Unlike grit, the concept of resilience is not considered a specific aspect of personality. Research on resilience was influenced by proponents of positive psychology, “which advocates a broad view of the complexity of human behavior, including positive adaptation and growth.” Resilience is described as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances.”⁵ Among the qualities associated with resilience are “high self-efficacy, sense of mastery, self-discipline, tolerance, faith, good problem solving skills, being achievement oriented, internal locus of control, having good support systems.”⁶

Within the context of education, resilience "refers to the ability of students to succeed academically, despite difficult and challenging life circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding."7 Recent attention to student resilience marks a significant turning point in research on the academic achievement of underrepresented student populations, which had previously focused on deficits. “Disadvantaged” students were characterized as incapable, unprepared, culturally compromised, and at-risk to fail.8 Embedded in the deficit approach is the assumption that these students lack the personal resources, support networks, and social capital to succeed academically.9

Reporting on a study of resilience among African American and Latino/a students, Everett-Haynes and Deil-Amen write, “resilient students have primarily been identified as those who are able to preserve their racial/ethnic identities while mastering the skills and strategies necessary to achieve in educational settings.”10 The college experiences of racial and ethnic minorities are differentiated from that of their white counterparts by persistent stereotypes and other forms of discrimination related to their minority status.

In their review of research related to resilience among Black male college students, Kim and Hargrove found that students were able to succeed in hostile educational environments because of “a strong understanding of negative majoritarian views of Black males. Practicing prove-them-wrong behavior, they refused to engage in social distancing in order to oppose campus racism, instead developing meaningful supportive relationships.” Encouragement from same-race peers, along with a fervent belief in their capabilities, significantly influenced their ability to persist in college. In addition, resilient Black male college students capitalized on supportive relationships with family members, mentors, and faculty; took advantage of institutional academic support programs; and found inner strength from spirituality.11

Many resilient Latino/a college students tend to rely on "local circles, such as family and friends," for support. Findings from a study of academically successful Latino/a suggest students see higher education not as “a place where one aspired to become another person, but a place to further evolve.”12 Research conducted by Cavazos et al. indicates that academically successful Latino/a students are motivated by a “deep conviction that they were in control of their academic futures,” because of their capacity for hard work. The authors write “many of this study’s participants reported that they were not the smartest individuals. They stated that hard work, effort, and persistence played a more important role than intelligence in their academic achievement.”13 While the authors do not specifically refer to grit in their analysis, many of the respondents’ self-descriptions echoed the salient aspects of this construct.

In general, research on resilient students, including first-generation, low-income, and racial and ethnic minorities, emphasizes the role of positive parental attitudes toward education, networks of support, and a belief in one’s abilities to succeed in educational environments in the face of adversity, among other factors. Resilient students arrive at colleges and universities equipped to meet the challenges of higher education. For students from lacking this kind of foundation, however, academic success is more elusive, raising the question, What can colleges and universities do to foster qualities associated with resilience in students, especially those representing underrepresented populations?

In an investigation of college student stress, resiliency and attitudes toward thinking and learning, Circo Webb highlights the potential for learning environments and other educational contexts to promote the adaptive aspects of resiliency in relation to learning. She writes “the environment created in each [educational setting within the college] can potentially limit or contribute to individual students’ cognitive processes and abilities to be resilient.”

Morales argues that findings from research on resilient students can inform educational theory and practice, in reference to the four related “dynamics” of resilience theory: (1) Risk factors represent mainly environmental factors, such as inferior schools or lack of money for test prep or other educational resources that can have a negative impact on academic success. (2) Protective factors, such as mentors, parental role models, and caring teachers, can alleviate the impact or risk factors. (3) Vulnerability areas are problems that arise often in relation to risk factors, such as how the lack of access to honors courses affects a student’s college application.

Focusing on protective factors and compensatory strategies, Morales suggests that higher education institutions can adopt “attitudes, and values . . . to increase the degree to which they create an environment conducive to resilience.” These suggestions for practice include ongoing attention to building students’ belief in their ability to succeed while helping them to realistically assess their strengths and weaknesses and encouraging their abilities to make connections with supportive individuals and educational resources. In addition the literature on grit, with its emphasis on perseverance and goal-orientation, suggests further educational opportunities and strategies to enhance student success.

Suggested discussion questions:

1. In your opinion, what are the characteristics and qualities that enhance student academic success?

2. In what ways does current can Student Affairs practice and programming foster resilience and grit in students? How can practice be enhanced in this regard?

3. How can Student Affairs practitioners work with faculty to create educational environments that capitalize on students’ non-cognitive strengths?

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**Snow Date:** Friday, May 5, 2017.

**Core Readings.**


**Additional Resources.**


*Abstract:* A systematic review was conducted to produce an up-to-date and comprehensive summary of qualitative and quantitative evidence specific to the factors related to undergraduate Latina/o student academic success outcomes during college. The purpose of the study was to make sense of and provide critique to this rapidly growing body of research, as well as to direct future research efforts. Findings indicate that a combination of (a) sociocultural characteristics; (b) academic self-confidence; (c) beliefs, ethnic/racial identity, and coping styles; (d) precollege academic experiences; (e) college experiences; (f) internal motivation and commitment; (g) interactions with supportive individuals; (h) perceptions of the campus climate/environment; and (i) institutional type/characteristics are related to one or more academic success outcomes for Latina/o students. The article concludes with specific recommendations including the use of additional methods, frameworks and perspectives that we hope will be useful in advancing this line of work.

Abstract: Other than talent and opportunity, what makes some people more successful than others? One important determinant of success is self-control—the capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation. A second important determinant of success is grit—the tenacious pursuit of a dominant superordinate goal despite setbacks. Self-control and grit are strongly correlated, but not perfectly so. This means that some people with high levels of self-control capably handle temptations but do not consistently pursue a dominant goal. Likewise, some exceptional achievers are prodigiously gritty but succumb to temptations in domains other than their chosen life passion. Understanding how goals are hierarchically organized clarifies how self-control and grit are related but distinct: Self-control entails aligning actions with any valued goal despite momentarily more-alluring alternatives; grit, in contrast, entails having and working assiduously toward a single challenging superordinate goal through thick and thin, on a timescale of years or even decades. Although both self-control and grit entail aligning actions with intentions, they operate in different ways and over different timescales. This hierarchical goal framework suggests novel directions for basic and applied research on success.


Abstract: The importance of intellectual talent to achievement in all professional domains is well established, but less is known about other individual differences that predict success. The authors tested the importance of 1 noncognitive trait: grit. Defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, grit accounted for an average of 4% of the variance in success outcomes, including educational attainment among 2 samples of adults (N = 1,545 and N = 690), grade point average among Ivy League undergraduates (N = 138), retention in 2 classes of United States Military Academy, West Point, cadets (N = 1,218 and N = 1,308), and ranking in the National Spelling Bee (N = 175). Grit did not relate positively to IQ but was highly correlated with Big Five Conscientiousness. Grit nonetheless demonstrated incremental predictive validity of success measures over and beyond IQ and conscientiousness. Collectively, these findings suggest that the achievement of difficult goals entails not only talent but also the sustained and focused application of talent over time.


Summary: This study of fifteen first generation American college freshmen documents their initial semester with a focus on factors and dispositions contributing to eventual success or failure. Students were identified prior to campus arrival, allowing for immediate and real-time data collection as they were experiencing the beginning of their college careers. Key factors identified and explored include the importance of active help-seeking, effective management of unstructured time, the dangers of underestimating academic rigor, and the crucial nature of the first two weeks. Suggestions for how the findings may be of practical use, as well as further research implications, are included.


Summary: Based on data from qualitative interviews with 50 high-achieving low-socioeconomic students of color, two clusters of important and symbiotic protective
factors are identified and explored. Each cluster consists of a series of interrelated protective factors identified by the participants as crucial to their statistically exceptional academic achievement. Using resilience theory, a detailed examination of how these groups of protective factors mitigated the potential effects of risk factors, thus contributing to the process of academic resilience, is presented. Practical uses of protective factor clusters also are presented and explored.


Abstract: Using six years of data chronicling the experiences of 50 academically resilient college students, this article focuses on the seldom-researched area of the psychology of academic resilience. Ubiquitous stressors such as subpar public schooling and the lack of social and cultural capital; psychosocial issues that arise during the resilience journey; and the compensatory psychological responses necessary to cope with the stress and, ultimately, thrive within the academic environment are explored in this article. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]


Abstract: Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) defined grit as one’s passion and perseverance toward long-term goals. They proposed that it consists of 2 components: consistency of interests and perseverance of effort. In a high school and college student sample, we used a multidimensional item response theory approach to examine (a) the factor structure of grit, and (b) grit’s relations to and overlap with conceptually and operationally similar constructs in the personality, self-regulation, and engagement literatures, including self-control, conscientiousness, cognitive self-regulation, effort regulation, behavioral engagement, and behavioral disaffection. A series of multiple regression analyses with factor scores was used to examine (c) grit’s prediction of end-of-semester course grades. Findings indicated that grit’s factor structure differed to some degree across high school and college students. Students’ grit overlapped empirically with their concurrently reported self-control, self-regulation, and engagement. Students’ perseverance of effort (but not their consistency of interests) predicted their later grades, although other self-regulation and engagement variables were stronger predictors of students’ grades than was grit.


Summary: Academically resilient students are those students who are academically successful, despite coming from the socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds that have typically predicted poorer educational outcomes. These students are an important group to study because if policymakers can understand what factors may have contributed to their succeeding against the odds, then they may be better able to support similar students in improving their academic performance. Raising the performance of socioeconomically disadvantaged students benefits both those individual students and the equity of the system overall. This brief uses 2011 eighth-grade data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to explore (1) how prevalent academically resilient students
are across education systems and (2) what factors are associated with academic resilience within those systems.


*Abstract:* College students who do not have parents with 4-year degrees (first-generation students) earn lower grades and encounter more obstacles to success than do students who have at least one parent with a 4-year degree (continuing-generation students). In the study reported here, we tested a novel intervention designed to reduce this social-class achievement gap with a randomized controlled trial (N = 168). Using senior college students' real-life stories, we conducted a difference-education intervention with incoming students about how their diverse backgrounds can shape what they experience in college. Compared with a standard intervention that provided similar stories of college adjustment without highlighting students' different backgrounds, the difference-education intervention eliminated the social-class achievement gap by increasing first-generation students' tendency to seek out college resources (e.g., meeting with professors) and, in turn, improving their end-of-year grade point averages. The difference-education intervention also improved the college transition for all students on numerous psychosocial outcomes (e.g., mental health and engagement).


*Abstract:* While first-generation college students are 'at risk', the majority do persist. Using in-depth interviews with 28 white college students I ask: How do white, first-generation, working-class students understand their college experiences, especially in terms of their academic, social, and cultural adjustment? Moreover, what kinds of factors seem to help or hinder their adjustment to college life? I discovered three patterns of adjustment among these students: (1) about half expressed few feelings of marginality and appeared well integrated into campus life; (2) one quarter experienced persistent and debilitating marginality; and (3) another quarter overcame their feelings of marginality en route to becoming socially and academically engaged on campus, with some transforming their feelings of marginality into motivation for social change. I argue that these variations can be understood by looking at how working-class students' economic resources may function as an asset, while their whiteness may function alternately as an asset and a liability. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

Dissertations.


*Abstract:* The importance of intelligence and cognitive factors in measuring academic success has been well documented (Bridgeman, McCamly-Jenkins, & Ervin, 2000; Kobrin, Patterson, Shaw, Mattern, & Barbuti, 2008; Mathiasen, 1984; Mouw & Khanna, 1993; Neisser et al., 1996; Noble & Sawyer, 2002; Poropat, 2009; Richardson & Abraham, 2009; Robbins et al., 2004). The same is true for the Big Five trait of Conscientiousness (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003; Kappe & van der Flier, 2012; O’Conner & Paunonen, 2007; Poropat, 2009; Richardson & Abraham, 2009; Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012). The goal of this study is to refine knowledge
about which personality traits make an individual successful in the college environment by examining new personality constructs beyond those discussed in the Five Factor Model. O’Connor and Paunonen (2007) show that the narrower facets tend to be able to explain more variance than broad traits. This can be explained by the fact that broad traits previously studied may encompass too much and be lacking in subtlety and nuance.

Grit and resilience are two personality traits that have been shown to predict success in many domains of life. The present study hypothesized that grit and resilience have independent and incremental predictive validity in college cumulative GPA and freshmen retention, over and above that of traditional predictors, which include intelligence, SAT scores, and high school GPA, and that grit and resilience are compensatory traits. It was also hypothesized that that grit and resilience, as well as intelligence, high school GPA, and SAT scores, would be correlated with senior year college GPA and freshmen retention. Demographic variables were also investigated in order to determine if they play a role in grit, GPA, and retention. Participants were recruited from Hofstra University. Participants are either in the current freshman or senior classes at the university. The number of participants that completed some portion of this study and were included in at least one analysis was 235. Eight four seniors and eighty three freshmen completed the study in full. All participants were asked to complete a variety of self-report measures including a background questionnaire, the Grit-S Scale, and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale as well as take a test of cognitive ability called the Wonderlic Cognitive Ability Pretest. They were also asked to give consent for the researcher to collect data from their school records, which included high school GPA, SAT scores, current cumulative GPA, and retention. Data analysis included bivariate correlations, multiple regressions, and an ANOVA in order to determine the relationship of all predictor variables (HS GPA, SAT, Intelligence, Grit, Resilience) to the dependent variables (GPA or retention), determine incremental predictive validity of grit and resilience, and determine whether grit and resilience are compensatory, respectively.

The results of this study both support previous findings and contribute new knowledge to the literature. Consistent with previous findings, the correlations between intelligence, high school GPA, and SAT scores and senior year GPA were all found to be significant. Previous findings that intelligence, high school GPA, and SAT scores are correlated with one another, that high school GPA is the strongest predictor of college GPA, and that grit is important for students in highly rigorous and competitive environments were also corroborated.

The current study also contributed to the research in new ways. Although the role of grit in predicting retention has been studied in the past, this study was able to show that grit can be an important predictor for retention in a more generalized population. Results of this study show that grit is correlated with and predictive of freshmen year retention, as well as a compensatory trait when predicting retention for students who do not perform as well as their peers on the SATs. This study also found that resilience is a compensatory trait for seniors that did not perform as well as their peers on the SATs. Just as grit helps seniors with high SAT scores stand out from their non-gritty peers, resilience helps lower achieving students make up the achievement gap. The purpose of this study was to be able to more accurately identify what makes a student successful at the tertiary level of education, specifically investigating the role of grit and resilience in predicting GPA and retention in undergraduate students at a private university. Implications of the results, limitations of the present study, and directions for future research are discussed.


Summary: This research study investigated college student life stress, resiliency and attitudes toward thinking and learning situated within the theoretical framework of resilience viewed through a social ecological perspective (Ungar, 2011). This Social Ecological Conceptualization of Resilience examines the interactions of protective factors and risk factors within cultures and contexts affecting individuals and groups. The culture of the university and the context of the classroom have an ability to add to college student life stress. Investigating the impact of learners' attitudes toward thinking and learning as connected or separate knowers could provide insight into the development of resiliency skills, lessening college student life stresses. This research study sought to discover if within the Social Ecological Conceptualization of Resilience, college students' attitudes toward thinking and learning could moderate the anticipated relationship between stress and resiliency. One hundred fifty-seven complete data sets resulted from this study. Three quantitative instruments based on Likert-type scales along with four demographic questions were included in an online survey made available to students taking courses within the College of Education at Oklahoma State University. The quantitative instruments included the Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning Survey (ATTLS), Student-life Stress Inventory (SSI) and How Resilient Are You? (HRAY) assessment. Multiple descriptive analyses, frequency distributions, and correlations, were employed on the data resulting in small statistically significant relationships between stress and resiliency and between resiliency and Ways of Knowing. However, the data failed to produce statistically significant results for Connected Knowing serving as a moderator between stress and resiliency and failed to produce statistically significant results for Separate Knowing serving as a moderator between stress and resiliency.


Abstract: The purpose of this narrative study is to understand the educational experiences of academically resilient, first-generation students from low-income backgrounds who demonstrate first-year success in college. Through a framework based on academic resilience, this study aims to provide a strengths-based exploration of the contributing factors that led to educational success for these students throughout their K-12 and postsecondary experiences. It addresses the following three questions: 1) What are the stories of first-generation, low-income students' educational paths, including their experiences of college exploration, college preparation, access to college, and first-year success? 2) Academic resilience theory posits that protective factors are key elements in students' experiences of resilience processes. What protective factors do academically resilient first-generation, low-income students experience, how do protective factors interact with each other and with risk factors, and how do these factors and processes change throughout students' educational paths? 3) What role does social support play in students' educational paths, and how do the nature, source, and relative importance of social support change throughout students' educational paths?

Collected through semi-structured interviews and journal reflections, the data for this study included the narrative educational stories of eight first-generation, low-income students who had recently experienced a successful first year of college at a large public university. Data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. Findings
indicated three primary themes that emerged from across participants’ experiences. The first theme highlights how each participant’s family emphasized education through prioritizing the value of education, holding high expectations for educational attainment, and actively protecting students from risk factors. The second theme emphasizes the ways in which students accrued educational resources and opportunities. Participants’ relationships with mentors, educators, and peers fostered social support and supplemented families’ resources. Additionally, educational programs and opportunities in students’ environments facilitated experiences that increased motivation, shaped aspirations, and imparted information. The third theme illustrates how students developed protective dispositional characteristics that supported their success, such as a strong work ethic, determination and self-efficacy, love of learning, proactivity and help-seeking, wanting to prove others’ negative expectations wrong, and positivity. Students described many ways in which they acquired beneficial traits from familial, environmental, and personal sources throughout their educational paths that they could draw on as strengths to achieve success despite the potentially negative effects of their risk factors. These characteristics were particularly important in mitigating postsecondary challenges as they arose during the first year of college.

The conclusions of this study highlight valuable ways through which first-generation, low-income students can accumulate meaningful educational resources, excel despite potentially negative risk factors, and navigate successful paths towards success in the first year of college. For participants, collaborative accumulation of educational resources led to success, social support networks adapted to facilitate success, and academic resilience effectively explained experiences of success. Participants’ experiences of academic resilience involved interactive processes through which protective factors worked together to minimize the effects of risk factors throughout their educational paths. A suggestion for broadening a model of academic resilience to incorporate the collective and cumulative role of protective factors and participants’ shifting involvement in their own academic resilience processes is presented. The study concludes with implications for expanding future research, informing practice, and guiding relevant policy.


Abstract: The rise in enrollment of non-traditional college students, specifically first-generation college students (FGS), over the last few decades has been well documented. Yet, with over 50 percent of the population with FGS, there still appears to be significant disparities between the graduation rates of FGS and their non-first generation peers (11–23 % for FGS and as much as 68% for their non-first generation peers). Utilizing an analysis of qualitative data, this interpretative phenomenological study sought to understand and explain how FGS explained their success at a career-focused institution. The research drew its data from in-depth, one-on-one interviews with Bachelor’s degree recipients at a private, non-profit institution within the southeastern part of the United States. Utilizing the theories of self-efficacy and academic resilience as the theoretical frameworks, the researcher collected thick descriptive narratives of the participants’ lived experiences. Through the analysis of this qualitative data, four emergent themes were identified to include: (1) personal and professional aspirations, (2) “you don’t know what you don’t know,” (3) it takes a village, and (4) success builds confidence. This study serves to guide institutions of higher education when determining program and services geared toward this specific population of student as well as contribute to the extant literature on first-generation
college students. Based on the study's findings, individuals in a student's personal and professional network as well as faculty and staff from the institution are instrumental in the social integration, academic adjustment and continued persistence of first-generation college students. The study also found that acquiring a student leadership position on campus helped FGS alleviate some of the barriers identified to persistence such as social integration and financial stability. Additionally, a first-generation college student's self-efficacy is raised through the vicarious experiences of others in their peer groups. Their self-efficacy is also raised through continued successful millstones achieved. This research suggests that first-generation college students, with the help of others, can become statistically elite, academically resilient college students just like their non-first generation college peers.


Abstract: The objective of this exploratory quantitative study was to investigate the relationships between grit, self-control, and the first academic semester of college students, and determine if the relationships differed by gender. Two research questions were examined; (1) What are the relationships between the individual factors of grit, self-control, and first-semester college GPA? And do they differ by gender? and (2) What combinations of factors (grit, self-control, high school GPA, and SAT scores) best predicts first-semester college GPA? And do they differ by gender? This study investigated 88 first-time, first-year college students and their academic success during their first college semester using three instruments: the 12-Item Grit Scale, the Self-Control Scale, and the Short-Form C of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Correlation analysis and stepwise regression methods were used to examine relationships. Findings from this study reinforce that high school GPA and SAT scores are predictors of college academic performance. However, the relationships between high school GPA, SAT scores, and fall GPA in this study were not as strong as indicated in previous studies. Results indicated that grit and academic performance had no relationship, while a small yet significant relationship was found between self-control and academic performance. Additionally, male and female students had somewhat different results in terms of grit, self-control, and academic performance. Predictors of academic performance for male students were high school GPA, self-control, and SAT scores. Female predictors were high school GPA and SAT scores. During an exploration process in this study, self-control was the only predictor of fall GPA when it was less than 2.67. Gender did not play a role in that particular finding, and the best and only predictor of all students fall GPA < 2.67 was self-control. That indicated that levels of earned GPA may be related to levels of self-control. The overall findings of this study contribute to further understanding factors related to college success, graduation, and better options for both life and career.
**Voters Offer Mixed Signs**

State Policy Impact Parsed

By Andrew Ujifusa

On an Election Day filled with dozens of state races and ballot measures with big implications for the nation's public schools, state teachers' unions and charter school champions had plenty to cheer in the aftermath, even as tax measures that would help pay for schools suffered setbacks in some places.

Union efforts were instrumental in overturning a trio of high-profile laws in Idaho that included limits on teachers' bargaining rights, along with pay based in part on student performance. And they were a key part of the coalition that successfully pushed for passage of a temporary tax measure deemed crucial to school funding in California.

Likewise, charter advocates were poised to celebrate the passage—after three previous failed attempts—of a ballot measure allowing charter schools in Washington state, along with a new law in Georgia that likely will increase charters' growth.

But labor supporters stumbled in their effort to enshrine collective bargaining in the Michigan Constitution. And they

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**Post-Sandy, Schools Claw Back**

**FOCUS ON: COLLEGE READINESS**

‘Soft Skills’ Seen As Key Element For Higher Ed.

By Caralee Adams

To make it in college, students need to be up for the academic rigor. But that’s not all. They also must be able to manage their own time, get along with roommates, and deal with setbacks. Resiliency and grit, along with the ability to communicate and advocate, are all crucial life skills. Yet, experts say, many teenagers lack them, and that’s hurting college-completion rates.

“Millenials have had helicopter parents who have protected them,” said Dan Jorek, the president of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors and the director of counseling and psychological services at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. “They haven’t had the opportunity to struggle. When they come to college and bad things happen, they haven’t developed resiliency and self-soothing skills.”

College enrollment is growing.
Jumping through hoops for kids, according to the United States, ranks ninth in the world in enrollment but last in completion rates, according to an analysis of 18 countries by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

As educators look for ways to turn that showing around, many schools are incorporating the softer, noncognitive skills into college-readiness efforts. The ability to solve problems and be resourceful are viewed by some as being as important as mastering mathematics and reading. Helping teenagers develop those skills is being addressed in high schools, college-freshman orientation, youth-development organizations, and parenting programs.

Infusing Responsibility

“I see parents and teachers jumping through hoops for kids, but I wonder if the kids are working as hard,” said Strickland, a counselor at Harrison High School in Kennewick, Wash.

At the 9th grade orientation meeting at Career Academy in Chicago, students are assigned to advisory groups in 6th grade (15 students to one teacher) and meet regularly through graduation to set goals and hold each other accountable. “The career dream is made up of ability, and it’s absolutely tied to hopes, aspiration, and purpose,” said Principal Michelle Cortez. “In advisory groups, we link these things.”

For many of Wilson’s students, who are from low-income, first-generation college-going families, the group becomes a “proxy parent” and support system, she said.

To develop communication skills, students lead conferences about their progress. They prepare presentations and discuss grades with their parents and advisory group. Teachers are trained to be quiet and focus on asking questions such as, “Why do you think this is happening?” The idea is for students to become problem solvers.

“The need to be advocating for themselves their entire career. If they don’t practice, they won’t learn how,” said Ms. Cortez.

Moving from high school to college or work is a major life transition, said David Conley, a professor of education policy and leadership at the University of Oregon, in Eugene. And schools have largely ignored the social and psychological aspects in favor of knowledge, in part because it’s easier to measure academic performance, he said.

Grades and SAT scores reflect other skills, such as study habits, focus, and time management, but they are all wrapped together, Mr. Conley said. He suggests schools provide two sets of grades—one that reflects mastery of content and the other behavior, as many elementary schools do.

Given that we want students to be more successful, why not give actionable information needed to change behavior?” he said.

Teachers should also give students longer, more complex assignments for which they need to do research, work in groups, and develop a broader set of strategies, Mr. Conley added.

Leadership Skills

Some nonprofits, such as the Chicago-based OneGoal, are stepping in with a broader approach to college readiness. That organization, which operates in 20 nonselective public high schools in Chicago and six in Houston, hires teachers to work with underperforming juniors and seniors during the day in a credit-bearing class.

Along with boosting ACT scores and managing rigorous courses, the curriculum focuses on five principles of leadership: resilience, ambition, resourcefulness, integrity, and professionalism.

“If you ask me which makes a bigger impact on persistence, I’d say the noncognitive skills—equally so,” said Jeff Nelson, a co-founder and the chief executive officer of OneGoal, which focuses on college completion.

The OneGoal teacher continues to monitor graduates—about 25 in a cohort—during their first year of college, talking with them about everything from grades to roommates to money issues.

Denise Taylor, a freshman at Northern Illinois University, in DeKalb, said she was motivated to stay on track because he didn’t want to let down his group and, particularly, his teacher.

“She worked so hard to help us all,” the 19-year-old said of his teacher, Jen Koszyk, at Prosser Career Academy in Chicago. “It was a sense of admiration. ... I’d be wrong of me to slack off.”

Mr. Taylor said the program helped him grow up, learn how to balance college life, and make his transition smooth.

“A 4.0 student could come to college and get a 2.0. There are a lot of distractions here,” he said. “It’s not the academics. It’s being too social that is going to mess you up.”

The YMCA is using Ms. Savitz-Romer’s book to be more intentional about working with students on issues of motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficacy, said Jarrett Hoyster, the Chicago-based organization’s national director of urban and educational development.

“We need less of them, not more,” he said. “That means more intentional coordination with school counselors to help incoming freshmen, but their resources are stretched and their priority is serving the most-troubled students. And many experts believe those soft skills need to be taught before students get to campus.

A holistic approach to college readiness that integrates academic content, college knowledge, and psychology may be what’s needed to help more students complete college, said Andrew Venezia, a project director at WestEd, a research organization based in San Francisco.

Rather than compartmentalization of courses, he advocates early training that includes noncognitive strategies and habits of mind that benefit students internal strength to persist.

“This is the critical nut to crack,” she said, “if our country is really going to support success for all learners.”
A Qualitative Study of Resilient Latina/o College Students

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This study was conducted with 11 Latina/o college students in order to provide insight into how these students develop a sense of resilience. Five factors from J. H. McMillan and D. F. Reed’s (1994) concept of resiliency appeared to play an important role in these students’ high academic achievement: high educational goals, sup-

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port and encouragement from parents, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy. Recommendations for future research are offered, and implications for practice are presented.

Key words: Latina/o, resiliency, academic achievement, higher education

It is well documented that the Latina/o population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006). In addition, statistical analyses have illustrated that Latina/o students have the highest dropout rate of any ethnicity in the United States (American Council on Education, 2008). Because of the growing Latina/o population, there is utility in understanding those factors that facilitate the academic performance of Latina/o students. Morales (2008) stated, “The focus on positive and successful Hispanic students should be continued. By exploring those who have been successful, a deeper understanding of achievement processes can be attained” (p. 25). It is also important to note that this study attempts to build and provide a different perspective on findings from J. Cavazos, Johnson, Cavazos, and Sparrow (in press), which involved the same participants. Hopefully, findings from the present study will provide insight into the factors that help Latina/o students succeed, thereby enabling and encouraging other Latina/o students to continue with their education.

First, the current article provides a literature review that highlights (a) the reasons for Latina/o students’ low academic achievement and (b) the factors that help students in general succeed academically. Second, we introduce resiliency as a theoretical framework to help interpret and understand findings from the current study. Third, findings from personal interviews with 11 Latina/o college students are presented. And finally, implications for research and practice are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term at-risk describes students who have a greater probability for academic failure due to adverse circumstances (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). In explaining Latina/o students’ high dropout rates, Fuentes (2006) commented, “In examining the list of influences, school and contextual factors were cited most frequently, rather than personal factors, as reasons for dropping out” (p. 27). In addition to the school and contextual factors identified by Fuentes, curriculum tracking (J. Cavazos, Cavazos, Hinojosa, & Silva, 2009; Gandara, 1995; Herrera, 2003) and lack of information about higher education (Immerwahr, 2003; Zalaquett, 2005) also likely play a role in preventing Latina/o students from enrolling in higher education. Furthermore, we hypothesize that these individual factors may function in
a systemic manner, thereby increasing the likelihood of a less than desirable outcome.

At the high school level, the concept of curriculum tracking is based on teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of students’ ability levels (Valencia, 2002) and involves actively discouraging Latina/o students from pursuing higher education (A. G. Cavazos, 2009; Gandara, 1995). In a study of 50 Latinas/os who obtained advanced degrees, Gandara highlighted the distinction between the college track and the non-college track. Findings revealed that 30% of these eventually high-achieving students were tracked away from higher education. In addition to having negative interpersonal effects, tracking implied to these students that adult authority figures in their lives held low expectations for them. The following is part of a statement from a student who was not in the college track regarding his school counselor: “And I told him I would like to go to college and could he fit me into college-prep classes … And he looked at my grades and everything, and said, well, he wasn’t sure I could handle it” (Gandara, 1995, p. 61). Moreover, in a study of Latina/o students who dropped out of high school, Davison-Aviles, Guerrero, Barajas-Howarth, and Thomas (1999) found that many students believed they were pushed away from education by administrators and school counselors. A Latino student reported that his counselor and principal told him that he would not graduate from high school (Davison-Aviles et al., 1999).

Lack of college information is another hurdle faced by Latina/o students. In a study of Latina/o high school seniors, Immerwahr (2003) found that some students were not given sufficient information with regard to higher education. One student provided the following account of her experience during a university tour:

My high school took some of us up there last February, and I was worried about whether or not I could apply still, and I discussed it with the tour guide. It was a random question and he explained it. Because it is a state college they give you time to decide, so you can apply in the fall or at the end of summer. (Immerwahr, 2003, p. 5)

Immerwahr found that the deadline was July 1, and this student evidently did not receive the correct information from the tour guide, her school counselor, or her teachers. In addition, a participant from Zalaquett’s (2005) study with Latina/o college students provided the following comment:

I wish I would have been educated about the intricacies of college admissions and preparation. I ended up not attending the 1st year because I couldn’t complete all the required paperwork and didn’t know that I qualify for a scholarship. (p. 39)

Despite challenges to pursuing higher education, recent studies have illustrated that some Latina/o students have become academically successful. Zalaquett (2005) found the following factors to be vital in the academic success of Latina/o
college students: family support, high value of education, and responsibility toward siblings. Moreover, Ceballo (2004) interviewed 10 Latina/o college students and found the following factors to be important in their high academic achievement: parents’ emphasis on higher education, the establishment of autonomy, nonverbal support from parents for higher education, and the importance of mentors and role models. In addition, Arellano and Padilla (1996) conducted a study with 30 Latina/o college students and found that some students believed that school personnel (e.g., teachers) played an important role in their decision to pursue higher education.

Although research has uncovered factors that help Latina/o students do well academically, only 8% of such students will obtain a graduate degree (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). There appears to be benefits to improving the understanding of how those who succeed in higher education perceive their life experiences (Morales, 2008). Although constructs such as the trait of hardiness (i.e., a commitment to a meaningful life, an internal locus of control, and interest in learning from experiences with positive or negative valence; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1992) have been linked with an individual’s resilience (Bonanno, 2004), less attention has been given to the concept of resiliency in order to understand the high academic achievement of Latina/o college students.

Resiliency is defined as “the ability to cope with adversity and overcome the most challenging circumstances” (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005, p. 319). McMillan and Reed (1994) contended that positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., high expectations from family) and individual factors (e.g., goal setting, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy) play a role in developing resiliency. First, family support results in high expectations and encourages students to pursue those expectations. Second, resilient students have concrete and high goals with regard to their academic futures (McMillan & Reed, 1994). McMillan and Reed also used the term reality check to describe a circumstance in a student’s life (e.g., poverty) that illustrates the importance of setting high educational goals and demonstrates that opportunities could be minimal without higher education. Third, resilient students have high levels of intrinsic motivation (i.e., participating in an activity for self-interest, challenge, or enjoyment; Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005). Fourth, resilient students have an internal locus of control and believe that (a) effort and hard work are important and (b) goals are influenced by these individual actions (Rotter, 1954). And finally, resilient students have high self-efficacy, which is the belief in one’s abilities to successfully complete certain tasks (Bandura, 1995). Ultimately, McMillan and Reed contended that the development of resiliency involves a combination of intrinsic (e.g., the student wants to become successful) and extrinsic (e.g., the student has support from family) factors.

The current study included interviews with 11 Latina/o college students in order to explore those factors that facilitated their high academic achievement. Five resiliency factors (McMillan & Reed, 1994) provide the framework within which
these students’ perspectives are presented. All participants had (a) high grade point averages and (b) prestigious academic credentials. In addition, nine participants were the first in their families to attend college despite growing up in adverse conditions (e.g., poverty).

METHODS

Participants

Eleven Latina/o students from a Hispanic-serving institution in the southwestern United States were recruited to participate in the current study. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select students who met the following criteria: identified as racially Chicana/o, Hispanic, or Latina/o; had a grade point average of 2.9 or higher; and were enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student. In order to recruit participants, the lead author sent an e-mail to several student organizations at this Hispanic-serving institution and requested participation. Several students responded to this initial e-mail and were asked to recommend other students (i.e., snowball sampling; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to participant recruitment.

All of this study’s participants identified themselves as Hispanic, Chicana, or Latina/o. The term Latina/o is used here to describe each participant, which is consistent with previous literature (Zalaquett, 2005). Furthermore, participants were asked to select a fictitious name to ensure anonymity and to provide a method of identification. These fictitious names are used here to identify each participant.

Personal Interviews

An interview script was used to ensure consistency. Based on the relevant literature regarding the success of Latina/o students (e.g., Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gandara, 1995), the interview script consisted of open-ended questions that were designed to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the factors they felt influenced their high academic achievement. Questions specifically addressed participants’ perceptions of the role of parental support and personal qualities in their academic achievement (e.g., “What do you think are some of the qualities that have helped you become successful during college?”). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the lead author.

Data Analysis

Three researchers with previous experience categorized participants’ stories and statements according to the resiliency factors (McMillan & Reed, 1994). The first
reviewer was a graduate student who has extensive experience working with the Latina/o population and a counseling internship. The second reviewer has an extensive background in qualitative research and experience in qualitative coursework (i.e., a Ph.D in Counseling Psychology) and had published several qualitative journal articles. The third reviewer also had experience in qualitative research, particularly with the analysis of personal interviews.

Trustworthiness

Several steps were followed to enhance this study’s trustworthiness. First, Latina/o students were purposefully selected to ascertain first-hand perspectives regarding the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that were involved in their high academic achievement. Because of their success in higher education, these participants may have provided valuable insight into the factors that help Latina/o students succeed academically. Second, three researchers with previous experience analyzed the participants’ responses. And finally, the lead author believed he created a safe and non-threatening environment via reflective listening and the conveying of empathy, thereby facilitating the participants’ ability to provide personal and relevant insights.

RESULTS

The findings are presented within a framework of the following resiliency factors: goal setting, interpersonal relationships, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and self-efficacy. Specific statements and stories are used to illustrate participants’ beliefs about those factors contributing to their high academic achievement.

Goal Setting

All of this study’s participants reported having academic goals that included obtaining some form of education beyond the baccalaureate level. Moreover, these participants provided clear and specific goals. For example, Alicia mentioned how she wanted to continue with her education beyond completion of a bachelor’s degree. She stated, “My goals do include graduating from college, getting a master’s, getting possibly a PhD.” Veronica also reported having clear goals about her career in academia. She said, “Finishing my dissertation. That’s my goal … Then after that, getting my job and teaching at a university. And after that, getting a book out. And after that, maybe getting another degree.” Mary also described her goal of pursuing an advanced degree:
I thought about going into education, but I thought the biggest impact I could achieve was getting a law degree or getting something related to that field because that’s where you can get to help the most people that you can as far as issues are concerned.

Finally, Michael stated that his goals included obtaining a doctoral degree and teaching at a university. He provided the following account: “I am a history and political science professor in the future.”

Nine of this study’s participants had grown up in poverty and were first-generation college students. These students had been subjected to adverse living conditions that included housing made of straw, living from paycheck to paycheck, and worrying if food would be on the dinner table. Their statements provided insight into possible motivators (i.e., reality checks; McMillan & Reed, 1994) for their identified goals. For example, Alicia had witnessed the struggles of her father in his occupation and had seen how her family did not have money while she was growing up:

Right now, he is working as a mechanic, and I see that he works long hours and he tries really hard. He is always frustrated because he says he doesn’t have enough to give us. And what happens is that he comes home, and you look at his hands, and they are so old and so dry and worn, and he says it’s because he didn’t get that education.

Similarly, Monica talked about her parents’ struggles when she reported, “I see the struggle my parents had, just to get by, to make the payments.” Mary also provided insight into her parents’ struggles with the following account: “I learned along the way based on the things that I’ve seen in my family. My family struggled, first of all. They lived in a car for two years.” Unlike Alicia, Monica, and Mary, who described their parents’ struggles, Michael had experienced the demands of manual labor first hand. He described his experience as follows:

I didn’t want that type of life where I was sweating in the sun and getting paid minimum wage, and sometimes not even minimum wage, but sometimes you got kind of paid by contract … you had to finish 10 acres in so many days or so many hours. By the time you finish those 10 acres, you get paid a certain amount. So I kind of started realizing, not that I ever questioned myself about going to college, but I started realizing more of the value in education, and especially postsecondary education.

Interpersonal Relationships

Each participant reported having support from his or her family. This support included (a) high expectations and (b) encouragement to fulfill those expectations. Jose reported, “My parents, from the time I was born, said education was the most important thing you can have.” Michael, who had been a migrant farm worker as
an adolescent, stated that his parents also stressed the importance of education from an early age. He said, “The weird thing about my family in particular is that they didn’t go to school, but they always instilled in us this responsibility or civic duty to go to school.” Furthermore, most of this study’s participants described encouragement from their parents. Daniel stated, “They just encourage me. If I want to accelerate in my studies or take extra hours [college classes] or I want to do something, they’ll encourage me to do it.”

Another form of support included written communications at difficult points in an academic semester. For instance, Veronica recalled an undergraduate course in which her professor told her that she would not succeed because she was Latina. She described the ensuing support from her parents:

Family support is also very important. I left home when I went off for undergrad. I left also to go get my master’s. And family support was always there. My parents sending me little notes saying “You can do it” and “Mija, we love you. You’re going to do great on finals.”

Although most participants reported high parental expectations and encouragement to reach those expectations, other participants offered a different perspective. When Mary wanted to apply to one state’s flagship university, which was 4 hr from her home, her father did not approve. Mary said,

I told my dad I’m planning to apply to [university]. I want to apply here, I want to apply there. He said, “No, you’re not going to apply because if you apply and if you go off somewhere else, we’re going to disown you as a family. We’re not even going to talk to you, support you, or help you in any way if you go away.”

Monica also reported that her parents did not want her to leave for a university that was 3 hr from her home:

They also played a very important part in me coming to [the university] because they’re very strong in being united. So the option of moving away to [the city] would not be a possibility … Basically if I left, I’d be disowned.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

All participants in this study reported presented statements that were congruent with high levels of intrinsic motivation. Mary provided the following representative quote of the enjoyment she felt when helping others: “I would have to say that I like to help people, particularly because I didn’t have that help.” Because Mary did not receive assistance in high school, she elaborated on how she developed this interest in helping others:
But mainly what really sparked that instinct for helping people was when I started getting involved in student government. That’s when I really felt like, “Wow, I did not know there was such a student government.” I didn’t know we could do that … When I get involved in [student government], this is amazing. It feels so good to be able to help people and know that you’re a voice that can represent people.

Veronica described how she enjoyed the role of student and community helper. She shared her enjoyment as follows:

I know that education is a way that I can change the world, be it by helping other students learn, or through ideas and developing ideas and helping my community. So that’s how I feel. I’m a lifelong student. I love it!

Rick, who was near the completion of his doctoral degree at the time of data collection, supplied this statement regarding intrinsic motivation: “But I have a bleeding heart for kids and I love to teach and as long as I can continue teaching, I will.” In addition, Jose stated that he wanted to help others because of his self-interest:

So after medical school, after my residency, what I would like to do is to go to a third-world country, and be there for about a year or two years, and offer my services. That’s the only thing I want to do. I want to be able to help other people; whether or not I get compensated for that is not high on my list.

And finally, Michael stated that his motivation came from self-interest and enjoyment. Although he had worked 12 hr per day as a migrant farm worker, he reported using his lunch break to read his encyclopedia. He shared the following experience:

A lot of what I know, honestly, is through these encyclopedias because I would spend the entire summer, like during the breaks while I was working, we would have a 45 minute break to eat, and I would spend my time reading.

As most participants had come from low-income households, they had endured struggles that included poverty and low expectations from the academic community. However, these experiences had a positive impact on the participants, who described the challenge of creating change. For example, Cristina reported that she wanted to reduce the achievement gap among ethnicities. She stated, “I would like for us to be at the same level academically with White people. Be able to compete without affirmative action.” Michael also discussed the achievement gap when he said, “It’s the fact that I want to get rid of the stereotype that Mexican Americans are indigent or they’re not capable of reaching the mentality or the achievements of other of what they would call ‘superior’ ethnicities.” Ultimately, Michael reported
that he was motivated by the challenge of changing attitudes toward Latinas/os from his area. He described his motivation as follows:

What motivates me more than wanting to, because I am not in it for the money, having grown up as a migrant farm worker I’ve been humbled, so it’s not the money, it’s mainly getting rid of that stereotype, showing what can come from [this area], what can come from the Mexican-American race.

Although all of the participants reported being intrinsically motivated, some participants mentioned external factors as sources of motivation. Alicia stated that money was a factor in her decision to pursue higher education. She said, “The money, because I know that if you don’t have an education, your career cannot go very far.” Amanda shared a similar sentiment: “I guess I’m working to be poor right now, and I want to improve myself. That way I can have money to go on vacations, to have money to save up for a house, and things like that.” However, Alicia and Amanda were motivated by intrinsic factors as well. Amanda shared, “But just being happy essentially with the money, if you have tons of money and you’re not happy, then it’s pointless. I guess they go hand in hand. They correlate.”

Internal Locus of Control

None of the participants in this study reported using stories or statements that represented an external locus of control. Each participant mentioned the importance of effort and hard work in the accomplishment of their goals, and they said that they were in control of their academic futures. For example, although obstacles could have affected Mary’s mentality toward her final goal, she believed she was in control of her academic future:

I thought to myself, “You know what, I’m kind of like in a race here. There’s a finish line, and the finish line is the goal that I achieve. I may trip and I may fall, but I need to get up to get to the finish line. If I don’t get up and I don’t go toward the finish line, then I’m never going to get there.”

Rick also discussed the importance of believing that he was in control of his academic future by working hard and improving his skills. He provided the following statement: “If you don’t build on your skills and if you don’t develop them, nobody else is going to go out and do that for you.” In addition, Alicia reported her belief that her effort allowed her to obtain a 3.2 grade point average in her undergraduate studies. She said, “I don’t want to say I’m smart because I think I just try, I don’t try as hard as I should, but I try and I know at the end of the day what I want.” Furthermore, Amanda mentioned the importance of surrounding herself with other students who were committed to education. She supplied this statement about taking control of her environment: “Just surrounding yourself with people that are doing
good, that are continuing their education. Their education helps me do good in school ... I am surrounding myself with good people who are doing good for themselves.” In addition to taking control of her social environment, Amanda described how she was in control of her academic environment with the following statement: “I like to be prepared for class.”

Self-Efficacy

Some participants did not believe they were smart and believed other qualities were more important in their high academic achievement. In fact, only one participant included intelligence in response to the question “What do you think are some of the qualities that have helped you become successful during college?”

Most participants described effort, perseverance, and self-belief as the qualities they felt allowed them to become successful in college. For example, Mary provided her opinion of the importance of perseverance as she described her parents’ struggles and how they had overcome homelessness. Based on this experience, Mary realized that her parents were resilient in the face of adversity, which influenced her belief that she could be the same. Mary stated,

My family struggled. They lived in a car for two years, to owning two houses ... What do I have to lose by just trying? Just try and go out there and try to do what you want to do because if they [my parents] were able to achieve that, what makes me think I can’t? It’s possible. I think it’s possible.

Moreover, effort and hard work were mentioned by Sandy, who commented,

I could say that the quality would be intelligence and all of this other stuff, but the truth of the matter is that it’s the tools that are the qualities. The tools of persevering, not giving up, trying your 110 percent.

Finally, Amanda described how her parents helped her develop a positive self-efficacy:

My parents would always say, “Amanda is going to go to college. Amanda is going to college.” It wasn’t that they pushed me, but they always backed me up and they always said, “Amanda is the smart one. She’s going to do good. She’s going to graduate. She’s going to go to college.”

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated 11 high-achieving Latina/o college students in order to provide insight into how they developed a sense of resilience. Several im-
important findings were uncovered. First, the importance of valuing education in the Latina/o household continues to be strongly supported. In the current study, parental support included high educational goals and encouragement to pursue those goals. Although most participants reported that their parents were unable to contribute financially to their educational endeavors, the parents did provide support in other ways, including through supportive letters and words of encouragement. Without this parental support, it is possible that some of the participants may have given up and forgone higher education. Second, the findings indicate that there is not a single clear path to academic achievement. Some of this study’s participants were not high academic achievers in high school, yet they succeeded in higher education. Teachers and school counselors must understand that lack of success in high school does not necessarily result in lack of success in college or in any other endeavor. For example, Latina/o students who were tracked away from higher education because of IQ scores (Gandara, 1995) or perceived ability levels (A. G. Cavazos, 2009; Herrera, 2003) overcame low expectations and obtained advanced degrees. Therefore, it is important that teachers communicate high expectations to all Latina/o students (White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2003) regardless of academic achievement at the high school level.

Although goal setting is important in terms of academic success, the self-belief that one can accomplish those goals is likely more important. According to Maddux (2002), “The timeless message of research on self-efficacy is the simple, powerful truth that confidence, effort, and persistence are more potent than innate ability” (p. 285). Participants from the current study provide additional support for this from the perspective of the Latina/o culture. These students developed a belief that their efforts and hard work would result in high academic achievement, thereby facilitating the deep conviction that they were in control of their academic futures. Similar to previous research (Gandara, 1995), some students from the current study reported that they did not believe they were “smart” and cited other qualities, such as confidence and motivation, as being more important in facilitating their high academic achievement.

Understanding how resilient qualities help Latina/o students has important implications for teachers and school counselors. Many of this study’s participants reported that they were not the smartest individuals. They stated that hard work, effort, and persistence played a more important role than intelligence in their academic achievement, providing support for the contention that all Latina/o students should be introduced to the important concept of resiliency (Gandara, 1995). For example, if a Latina/o student reports that he or she is not smart (e.g., has a low SAT score) and that this is why he or she will not pursue higher education, a school counselor or teacher should help this student understand that applied hard work and persistence may be more important than ability or results on standardized tests. However, because telling students that they should try or work harder does
not result in higher academic achievement 100% of the time, teachers should try to provide students with real evidence that their efforts will influence their academic performance (Woolfolk, 1990). Based on previous research (Gandara, 1995; Woolfolk, 1990) and findings from the current study, it appears vital that teachers emphasize the importance of hard work and effort in attaining goals.

There are numerous benefits to teaching resiliency characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy and internal locus of control) in K–12 schools. Research has confirmed that children can become resilient regardless of minority ethnic status, single-parent family status, or low socioeconomic status (Castro, Johnson, & Smith, 2008; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Waxman & Huang, 1996). Moreover, Nelson and Low (2003) and Wolin and Wolin (1993) contended that resilient behaviors can be learned and practiced until they become fixed internal strengths. For example, resilience in students can be enhanced by school personnel via a choice curriculum, school policies, and leadership programs (Catterall, 1998). One program designed to improve students’ resiliency is the Teen Leadership Program (Flippen Group, 2005). The Teen Leadership Program fosters resiliency factors such as motivation and emotional and behavioral self-regulation, thereby improving students’ abilities to become more resilient to challenges (Castro et al., 2008; Flippen Group, 2005). In a study that examined the impact of the Teen Leadership Program with a group of seventh-grade students (58% of the sample were Latina/o students), Castro et al. found that teaching resiliency skills enhanced prosocial behaviors. That is, students who went through the resiliency curriculum had less office referrals than those students who did not receive the resiliency curriculum. Other research has also found that teaching resiliency skills can result in positive outcomes (Bernard, 1997; Bosworth & Earthman, 2002; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

The practice of not allowing children to leave home for college is not uncommon in the Latina/o community (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000). Although two Latina students from the current study had not been allowed to leave home for college, teachers and counselors cannot confuse this practice with the notion that parents do not value education and do not support their child. Perhaps parents, particularly those who never attended college or finished high school, do not understand the differences among colleges, as research has found that they do not know what is involved in the college application process (Zalaquett, 2005). Instead of criticizing the Latina/o culture for its cohesiveness and its attitudes toward leaving home for college, teachers and counselors must (a) become aware of this cultural practice and perspective and (b) explain differences among institutions of higher learning. And finally, although parental attitudes toward advanced degrees were not explored in the current study, one participant provided the following statement: “My mother understands why I went for my master’s, but now in the doctorate, they’re like, ‘Is it that much harder? Why are you complaining? Are you ever going to finish?’” This participant’s mother had a col-
lege degree, but it is possible that she did not understand the requirements of a doctoral degree. Given the importance of parental support and encouragement in the Latina/o community, it appears that this support could also play a role in the pursuit of an advanced degree. Therefore, when parents are given college information they could also be given information about advanced degrees and the opportunities to pursue these degrees.

This study’s findings support the existence of an interactive system of factors that help Latina/o students become academically successful. Because some Latina/o parents may not set high expectations for their children, future research should explore how students become resilient and move toward academic achievement without their parents’ support and encouragement. In addition, two participants who had prestigious academic credentials reported that their siblings dropped out of high school and did not pursue higher education. The participants and their siblings had similar histories (i.e., genetic pool, home and school environment), yet there was a difference in academic achievement. Future research that looks into the intrinsic factors (e.g., self-efficacy) that differentiate academically successful Latina/o students from their less successful siblings will improve understanding in this domain. Finally, the current study did not identify students who were exposed to resiliency factors but who did not succeed academically. Future research that attempts to recruit and study such a participant base is warranted.

Because only 11 Latina/o participants were interviewed for the current study, the generalizability of the results is not known. However, this study’s findings are consistent with the literature regarding Latina/o students, which supports (a) the existence of high expectations from parents (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006; Zalaquett, 2005), (b) the importance of higher education (Zalaquett, 2005), and (c) the maintenance of an internal locus of control (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005) and high self-efficacy (Morales, 2008). Because the students who participated in the present study attended the same university, their experiences and personal attributes may differ from those students who attend other universities. In addition, most participants from the current study responded to an e-mail that requested their participation, so persons who volunteered may differ from those who did not (Sanchez et al., 2006).

**CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the current study was to provide insight into those resiliency factors that help Latina/o students move toward greater academic achievement. The following factors were not only important to all participants but appeared to play an important role in each student’s resiliency: high educational goals, support and encouragement from parents, intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control, and high self-efficacy. Given these findings, it is recommended that school personnel
provide Latina/o students with high expectations and implement resiliency skills into daily activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the participants who shared their stories. We hope you never give up in the pursuit of your dreams! In addition, the lead author would like to dedicate this article to his mother, Patsy Vela, and his grandparents, Judge Moises and Mary Jo Vela. Thank you for your support and encouragement in pursuing and completing my doctoral degree.

REFERENCES


This essay addresses persistence and success of an underrepresented group enrolled in college who are white, working-class first-generation students. The discussion examines these college students and the challenges they face. The discussion analyzes why first-generation college students persist while others do not. Additionally, the discussion explores issues of access to some public universities due to socioeconomic status backgrounds and rising costs of higher education. Finally, the discussion examines programs used at many colleges and universities which support first-generation students and how this information can be employed to assist white, working-class first-generation college students to persist and succeed in higher education.

Introduction

Globalization and the rapid changes of technology have created a need for high-level work-related skills, which at a minimum require a four-year college degree. College has become an expensive venture, and the reward of attending college is a major influence why many students enroll (Smith & Zhang, 2009). The issue is while students enroll in four-year institutions, only 60% complete a bachelor's degree within six years (ACT Research and Policy, 2013). Within this group, there is an underrepresented group who are first-generation students. First-generation students make up approximately 34% of college or university's freshmen population (Stuber, 2011). While approximately one-third of first-generation students enter these institutions, only 73% return in their second year (Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Stuber, 2011). Additionally, this group will continue to increase (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Research on this group primarily focused on low-income, first-generation students. There is little research conducted on first-generation students who are white and come from a working-class background. This group is challenged academically and socially in college (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Thering, 2012). Stuber (2011) stated this student population falls below the educational institution's radar screen because they are profiled as a "racial majority and socioeconomic minority" (p. 120). What characterizes white, working-class, first-generation students? What are these first-generation students saying about college life? Why do most white, working-class, first-generation students persist while others do not? This discussion will explore what differentiates this student population, the challenges they face as they persist in the college environment, and how and why these students do persist. Additionally, the discussion will examine access to higher education and student-centered strategies to help this group succeed.
Defining the White, Working-Class, First-Generation College Student

What characterizes white, working-class, first-generation college students? For this discussion, 'white' is defined as being part of the white race (Stuber, 2011). Working-class is defined as students who have parents employed in occupations that require lower-level skills, lower pay, and do not need a college degree (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Stuber, 2011). First-generation college students are defined as having parents who do not possess a college degree (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Stuber, 2011). With a multitude of definitions that encompass this group, there are many challenges white, working-class, first-generation college students’ face.

The Challenges

The complex challenges white, working-class, first-generation college students face include financial and emotional difficulties, and academic and social experiences (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Thering, 2012; Wiggins, 2011). The financial constraints some students experience puts them in a position to commute back and forth to school instead of living on campus. Students who commute may find themselves with little time to socialize with other students before or after class, or being involved in learning communities and study groups (Stebleton & Soria, 2012). The financial constraints some students experience puts them in a position to commute back and forth to school instead of living on campus. Students who commute may find themselves with little time to socialize with other students before or after class, or being involved in learning communities and study groups (Stebleton & Soria, 2012). Even if students live on campus, they are not likely to engage in extracurricular activities, interact with faculty and other students, or use support services (Stebleton & Soria, 2012).

This reluctance to participate in campus life may be due to the lack of knowledge and experience about college from their working-class parents (Barry, Hudley, Cho, & Kelly, 2008). Barry, Hudley, Cho, & Kelly (2008) stated students are challenged by their parent’s lack of understanding in providing guidance of college expectations. Additionally, first-year college student experiences can be stressful, and these life events are difficult to communicate to their parents (p. 105).

Finally, challenges about how to prepare for college create a barrier for college persistence and success (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011). High schools counselors are a good resource for first-generation students to become educated about college. High school counselors can suggest attending first-year seminar programs at colleges and universities. Also, these counselors are a good resource for students to understand overall academic expectations. Teacher/counselor influence, college application guidance, and a college-going culture among peers do help students prepare for college (Barry, Hudley, Cho, & Kelly, 2008; Pham & Keenan, 2011).

Access to Higher Education

When students decide to attend college, Smith & Zhang (2009) stated “the college-choice process is strongly influenced by variables such as students’ aspirations for college attendance, parental encouragement, mentors and teachers, peers, student culture, co-curricular activities, knowledge about college, college prep curriculum, academic, college, and career counseling, and the potential costs and rewards of attending college” (p. 86). However, there is another perspective regarding college-choice which inhibits white, working-class first-generation students’ opportunities to be enrolled at some colleges and universities. Both Oldfield (2012) and Schultz (2012) were white, working-class, first-generation college students. As professors employed at public universities, they shared their college experiences while questioning social status and educational opportunities in America. Oldfield (2012) suggested social class in America remains stagnant, with few
opportunities for those in lower socioeconomic backgrounds to improve oneself. Oldfield contended there is a decided gap in educational opportunities and outcomes between social classes. Oldfield stated that being part of the higher socioeconomic status provides more opportunities to attend and work at prestigious colleges and universities (p. 9). Schultz (2012) believed faculty shy away from any discussion regarding class issues because faculty come from privileged backgrounds and are not aware of perspectives from other lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, Schultz suggested that colleges and universities are slowly closing their doors to those other than the privileged class. Schultz stated “economic privilege in America translates into the ability of parents to place their children in better schools, and that gives them an advantage to secure admission to more elite universities” (p. 80). Although, America represents opportunities for all, in some higher educational institutions, Schultz stated class bias has resulted in declining social mobility, which makes it difficult for most to advance (p. 68). Schultz explained the major barrier in attending elite or big research state universities is the cost, which is becoming more and more out of reach for most students who come from working class backgrounds (p. 76).

Zandy (2011) agreed with the disparities between social class and higher education opportunities, stating “highly cultivated and economically privileged students go to elite universities where they pursue intellectual interests; working-class and lower-middle-class kids go to more affordable, less prestigious institutions where they train for jobs and accumulate debt” (p. 36). Zandy discussed college choice for the working class is limited. These working class students will choose a college and degree program which will help get them ready for today’s business world challenges while privileged students choose an elite university to explore liberal arts before attending graduate school (p. 36). Finally, Zandy concurred with Schultz’s (2012) belief in faculty shying away from the issue of social inequality. Zandy stated while educational opportunities continue to expand the social class gap expands too, creating a continuum of inequality in some higher education institutions.

Research on white, working-class first-generation students suggested enrollment at public universities is possible. Thering’s (2012) study conducted on white, working-class first-generation college students involved participants who attended a Research I university. Longwell-Grice & Longwell & Grice’s (2008) research on white, working-class first-generation college students comprised of participants who attended an urban research university in the South. Therefore, while Oldfield (2012), Schultz (2012), and Zandy (2011) suggested college-choice is inhibited by social class and financial constraints for these students, evidence in research demonstrated white, working-class first-generation college students continue to be enrolled in public universities.

Research Studies of White, Working-Class First-Generation College Students

Research studies found on white, working-class first-generation college students were mainly conducted using the qualitative approach. Qualitative research occurs in the natural setting of the participants in which “the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants (Creswell, 2003, p. 20). Most of these studies gathered data through open-ended interviews. The use of open-ended questions permits participants “to frame answers in their own words” (Stuber, 2011, p. 122).

Thering (2012) conducted a study of white, working-class first-generation college students who attended a large northeastern research university. Participants cited they attend college to be competitive in today’s
business world. Additionally, participants explained they want to advance their social status through higher education (p. 56). The findings suggested these participants witnessed their parents’ lack of job opportunities. These participants did not want to have the same life as their parents. These participants persisted in college for career purposes. Also, these participants cared only about the courses in their degree program which could be applied to a future job position (p. 52). The motivation to persist in higher education was to gain social mobility. In this study, the participants not only persisted in attaining a bachelor’s degree but continued on to earn a Master degree.

Stuber (2011) studied white, working-class first-generation college students in a small liberal arts college and a large public university. The findings were diverse. While a few participants felt alienated or did not feel they fit into college life, other participants overcame these feelings and became motivated and continued on with purpose (p. 123). Other participants were motivated by their own self-efficacy. Still, another group felt they were part of the college community just like everyone else who are working toward the same goal. This study explored university programs for white, working-class first-generation college students to learn if and when these students seek assistance. The conclusion indicated programs currently available in many colleges and universities to assist white, working-class first generation college students do appear to help them persist with their educational goals.

Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice’s (2008) used Tinto’s theory of student retention to explore the relationship between first-generation working-class college students and faculty. Tinto (1999) contended the frequency and quality of student-faculty contact helped students persist in college (p. 5). Equally important was the ability for students to communicate with faculty outside the classroom (p. 36). Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice’s (2008) found participants felt faculty did not care for them. Also, participants felt if they were to seek faculty’s assistance then they were not doing college on their own. In other words, these participants thought interacting with faculty was going to result in more negative than positive outcomes. As these participants felt they were on their own in figuring out what to do, by the end of the semester, all of the participants in this study did not continue with their education.

Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta (2011) used a questionnaire to explore first-generation students’ satisfaction with the university they were attending. The intent of this study was to understand student backgrounds and learning needs in order to provide them with various interventions. The study was conducted in a southwestern four-year university. The research instrument was a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire focused on areas such as time management strategies, attitudes about stress, and general questions about attending and selecting the university. The findings suggested students’ satisfaction with the university experience directly related to performing well in courses, keeping up with the academic work, and a strong desire to graduate as soon as possible. Additionally, the findings indicated the university reviewed the background of these students beforehand. Many students previously attended community colleges. The articulation agreements between the university and community colleges focused on providing academic advising at both institutions to support students in preparing for academic expectations. For the social aspect of college life, the university provided tickets for sporting events, allowing these students to mingle with university students (p. 43). The success with these programs indicated student satisfaction with the university experience help these students to persist with their educational goals.
Strategies to Engage and Retain White, Working-Class, First-Generation College Students

Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta (2011) demonstrated students who are satisfied with their college experience, both academically and socially, will persist toward their educational goals. While this study targeted first-generation college students, there still appears to be an issue in understanding how to assist white, working-class, first-generation college students to persist in college (Stuber, 2011). There are many different types of programs at colleges and universities which successfully support first-generation college students (Ramsey & Peale, 2010; Stuber, 2011; Wiggins, 2011). The information provided in these programs can be used to engage and retain white, working-class, first-generation college students. For example, involving faculty who were first-generation students to share their experiences about college life can create a bond of understanding about college expectations, fears, and successes with these students (Ramsey & Peale, 2010).

Wiggins (2011) promoted a particular program which targeted first-generation students. This program focused on the whole student. The focus was on academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, peer instruction, and small learning group communities (p. 2). This program continues to help first-generation students persist in college.

Ramsey & Peale (2010) promoted a variety of programs at colleges and universities used throughout the country which engage and retain first-generation students. One college reaches out to parents for support. Another college created a housing program specifically for first-generation students. This housing program created a structured environment with little to no outside distractions. This program has drawn national attention as a result of its success in retaining first-generation college students.

Stuber (2011) discovered various programs at colleges for white, working-class, first-generation students. Most of these programs focused on students’ freshman year. One program paired upper-level students with freshmen in an effort to provide a way for freshmen to adjust to college life (p. 128). Another program begins in the summer before students’ freshman year to provide resources within a social environment. This program promoted mentoring, tutoring, and academic advising during the summer. The information contained in this program gave first-generation students an understanding of college support services and academic expectations. One university required freshmen to live on campus. This requirement helped many freshmen adjust to college life. The university provided waivers to this requirement if a student lived close to the university. This waiver did appear to hurt students’ chance for social and academic engagement success as they felt isolated enough to consider dropping out (p. 126). Feelings of alienation do persist in white, working-class, first-generation college students. Stuber concluded that finding a reference group to connect to kept these students engaged and more likely to persist in their educational goals (p. 128).

Finally, one of the key elements in programs for first-generation students is mentoring. Crisp & Cruz (2009) provided evidence in qualitative studies conducted on students’ perception of their mentoring experiences. Overall, the findings indicated mentoring has a direct positive effect on student persistence and retention (p. 532). Colleges and universities who included mentoring in programs for first-generation students built on competencies needed for success in higher education. Mentoring involved research and academic support, career support, and personal consideration (p. 536). Students’ understanding of a good relationship with their
mentor involved having someone provide guidance in research and career advice, and being a good listener. These attributes were important to their college success. Mentor relationships found in programs were either, student-to-student, student-to-faculty, or student-to-staff member (p. 541). It is the relationship which meets the needs of the student, both socially and academically that defined the successful experiences students had. These experiences had led to student persistence in the college environment.

Conclusion

This discussion examined white, working-class first-generation college students’ challenges, failures, persistence, and success in higher education. The challenges this group faces range from financial and emotional difficulties to academic and social experiences. Additionally, these students struggle in communicating with their parents about college as parents do not possess experiences encountered in college. All of these factors hinder an understanding of higher education expectations. While some students succeed, others have failed. Students who dropped out of college believed they needed to figure out how to do college on their own. Research indicated social class barriers to some public universities, citing educational opportunities in America are not equal; yet enrollment for white, working-class first-generation students in these public universities does occur. Students who persist in higher education have found programs and reference groups which support their endeavors. Successful programs at many colleges and universities identify first-generation students and provide assistance which included advising, tutoring, mentoring, and special housing. The success of these programs promoted persistence in college students. Other higher education institutions can look at these successes and employ any number of these programs to support college students, especially for the white, working-class first-generation population.
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Deficient or Resilient: A Critical Review of Black Male Academic Success and Persistence in Higher Education

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What contributes to persistent trends of Black male educational underachievement? Past literature has often used a deficit-informed framework to answer this question, portraying Black male students as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail, feeding into negative stereotypes. In this article, our primary objective is to depart from this deficit-informed orientation, seeking out themes that speak to, and explain, Black male resiliency while discussing major developments in research on Black college men in both PWIs and HBCUs. We aim to fill gaps in existing research by using a more heuristic framework, one that may guide future research on Black male collegiate experiences and success by drawing upon resilience theories.

Keywords: Black male students, academic resilience, higher education, academic achievement

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Despite holding high aspirations to attend college, Black men comprised less than 6% of the entire U.S. undergraduate population in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to Toldson (2012), although college enrollment rates for Black men are proportional to Black male representation in the adult U.S. population, college attainment rates fall far short of these numbers. Black men lag behind their female counterparts and other racial and ethnic groups in key educational outcomes (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010); for example, the number of baccalaureate degrees earned by Black females in 2010 was approximately twice that of Black males (66% vs. 34%, respectively), a gap not reflected in other racial groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Additional evidence shows that almost 70% of Black men do not complete a college degree within six years, compared with 57% of the overall undergraduate student population (Harper, 2006).

What accounts for this pattern of African American male educational underachievement? Past literature has often used a deficit-informed framework to answer this question, portraying Black male students as incapable, unintelligent, disadvantaged, and at-risk to fail at best (Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Such literature feeds stereotypes that have been proven to negatively impact the academic performance and self-efficacy of these students, as well as institutional programming and policy strategies. Some recent scholarship has departed from a deficit-informed orientation by focusing on successful Black male achievers at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), demonstrating that successful Black collegians serve as agents, displaying strong self-efficacy and engagement. They leverage peers, family members, mentors, and spirituality along their journey to success (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hébert, 2002; Herndon, 2003; Moore, Madison-Colomore, & Smith, 2003; Museus, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2010).

Contrary to the discourse that highlights the “failure” of African American male students, a recurring theme in the literature of success is the resiliency of Black college males. Educational resiliency refers to the ability of students to succeed academically, despite difficult and challenging life circumstances and risk factors that prevent them from succeeding (Bryan, 2005; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Researchers who have implemented success-based approaches
to examining the academic achievement and attainment of Black school-aged males often arrive at similar findings. For instance, Tolldson’s (2008) quantitative study of over 5,700 Black school-aged males, which looked at factors shown to statistically improve educational outcomes for this population, found that many such factors are exactly those identified as important by various resilience theorists. Therefore, the primary objective in this article is to seek out themes that speak to, and explain resiliency, while discussing major developments in research on Black college men. Included are findings from success-based literature examining both PWIs and HBCUs; the authors also review research examining the extent to which certain key factors affect the educational experiences of Black male collegians. The goal is to fill gaps in current research by using a more heuristic framework, one that may guide future research on Black male collegiate experiences and success by drawing upon resilience theories.

ANATOMY OF THE CONVERSATION ON BLACK MALE SUCCESS VIA INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Walter Allen’s (1992) seminal work and Shaun Harper’s (2012) recent research serve as points of departure for this review. Allen (1992), in a national study of 1,800 Black students (872 attending PWIs and 928 enrolled at HBCUs), investigated how students’ backgrounds, campus experiences (racial composition/unity), and individual personality orientations were associated with outcomes connected to academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. His quantitative, multivariate study found that a combination of individual and institutional characteristics was a major predictor of academic achievement, social engagement, and occupational goals. Findings suggest that a student’s interpretation of, and reaction to, the stressors associated with an institutional setting determined level of success, highlighting the fact that students at HBCUs outgained their counterparts attending PWIs. Previous research findings substantiate this claim: Black students at PWIs experience microaggression that impedes their achievement, in comparison to the supportive HBCU campuses that cultivate Black collegians’ success (Allen, 1992; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1998).

Twenty years later, further elaborating Allen’s (1992) discussion, Harper (2012) centered on success factors across institutional contexts. A qualitative study documented 219 Black males’ academic achievement at 43 colleges and universities across 20 states. Adding a voice to the quantitative data, and departing from the tendency to frame the Black male student retention using a deficit model, the study sought to explore institutional programs, peer and familial relationships, and the effects of individual prowess in garnering social capital in support of the participant’s academic goals. Through a series of individual interviews and focus groups, Black men in Harper’s (2012) study shared the factors attributed to their successes, including the ability to effectively navigate racially charged campus environments, becoming engaged on campus through leadership opportunities, the development of meaningful relationships with peers and mentors, and receiving ample familial and spiritual support. Some participants also correlated college transition or pre-college programs and scholarship opportunities with their persistence and academic achievement.

These two studies work in tandem to help frame the scholarly conversation on Black male postsecondary success. Allen (1992), stated that “a major challenge confronting U.S. higher education is how best to replicate and expand examples of Black student college success” (p. 41). Harper (2012) responded through an analysis of the lived experiences of successful Black male collegians, looking at the factors—institutional and internal—as both attributable to their achievement. Applying these studies as a point of departure, the present review opens with an analysis of the literature on Black male success at PWIs.

BLACK MALE SUCCESS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

The majority of studies on Black men have examined the population’s negative experiences at PWIs, concentrating on the impact of racial battleground fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Although Allen (1992) argued that Black students experience significant racial microaggression
and lack of support services at PWIs, Harper (2012) contended that Black men have indeed persisted and excelled within this institutional context, despite existing institutional impediments.

Achievers within this institutional setting often serve as emissaries, displaying strong self-efficacy and engagement and using peers, family, mentors, and spirituality (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006, 2009; Hébert, 2002; Herndon, 2003; Moore, Madison-Colomore, & Smith, 2003; Museus, 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2010). Moore, Madison-Colomore, and Smith (2003) support the findings of both Allen (1992) and Harper (2012) in their qualitative study of 24 high-achieving engineering majors within a racially microaggressive PWI. These researchers explored the internal and external factors attributed to participant achievement and persistence within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. Through an analysis of data obtained by way of biographical questionnaires, individual, and focus group interviews, the grounded theory approach revealed that a “prove-them-wrong” coping mechanism was applied by these men. Explained by researchers as a psychological response to a majoritarian view of Black intellectual inferiority, this prove-them-wrong impulse was observed among participants through the adoption of a hyper-assertive academic posture (Moore, Madison-Colomore, & Smith, 2003). These men exhibited a deep self-efficacy with regard to academics, and reported being successful in their persistent efforts to engage with faculty members. Although the researchers succeeded in framing Black male achievement using a new concept, they did fall short by neglecting to expand on the discussion of possible psychological repercussions resulting from this coping mechanism (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001).

Similar to participants in the Moore and associates’ (2003) study, the men in Harper’s (2009) study countered negative perceptions through the pursuit of academic excellence, and intentional campus involvement as leaders, while also serving as social agents to other Black males. Harper (2009) discovered that 143 participants across 30 PWIs reported a strong understanding of negative majoritarian views of Black males. Practicing prove-them-wrong behavior, they refused to engage in social distancing in order to oppose campus racism, instead developing meaningful, supportive relationships. Their strong belief in their abilities coupled with same-race peer encouragement was a major factor in the persistence of these students. The findings on positive peer support are also found in Harper’s (2006) qualitative study of 32 Black male undergraduates at six universities in the Midwest. Harper (2006) sought to identify the roles played by Black male peers and the channels through which peer support is obtained for academic achievement among Black male collegians. During interviews, participants said that they intentionally accessed healthy peer relations through membership in fraternities, campus clubs, and by attending orientation programs; peer interaction and support was recognized as significantly enriching to their collegiate experiences. Moreover, these students leveraged their campus involvement as a means of advancing Black student concerns. Much like the Black men in the studies conducted by Moore and colleagues (2003) and Harper (2009), high self-efficacy and strong Black identity was prevalent in the men who successfully navigated the microaggressive environments in which they studied and lived.

Unlike those in Harper’s (2006) research, participants in Bridges’ (2010) study, conducted at a southeastern PWI, practiced psychological distancing to combat discriminatory campus practices known to impede success. Six men who participated in three focus groups revealed that they deemed the campus (which had experienced significant historical racial tension) unwelcoming to Blacks. These men fortified their sense of identity by reflecting on the accomplishments of their race, and ultimately, self-motivating themselves to persist. The psychological impact of this practice may be detrimental—one participant exclaimed that he was “definitely changed” by this experience, and additionally affirmed the need to “put up kind of a wall” (Bridges, 2010, p. 24). Although informative, Bridges (2010) missed the opportunity to explore this statement further, addressing ramifications (if any) associated with this distancing strategy, such as issues with race relations experienced after graduation. Since five of the six men in the study were born and raised in the institution’s home state, they viewed the school as a microcosm of the larger surrounding environment (Bridges, 2010). To fully understand the effects of this coping strategy, it would be
useful to examine whether a similar approach is prevalent in Black men from differing demographic backgrounds.

Black men are not a monolithic group, and not all Black college men at PWIs experience those environments in the same way. Some develop meaningful relationships among same-race peers, while others prefer familial support, or integrated peer relations. Williamson (2010) found that Black African and Caribbean men described significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their overall academic experiences in comparison to their African American counterparts. Williamson’s (2010) mixed methods study of 99 Black males majoring in STEM fields at a PWI examined data gathered from the Academic Integration Scale developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), and individual interviews, through the lens of Ogbu’s (1998) Cultural-Ecological Theory of Minority School Performance. African American men were deemed to have the lowest levels of engagement with faculty. Interestingly, despite ethnicity, all participants recognized family as being “a pivotal force” in their educational success and instrumental in sharing encouragement and resources. This finding refutes Ogbu’s (1998) hypothesis that African Americans receive less encouragement and support to succeed in college than non-voluntary minorities. Contrasting the studies by Moore and associates (2003), Harper (2006, 2009), and Bridges (2010), the men in Williamson’s (2010) study practiced Black distancing—they elected not to interact, and therefore did not benefit from supportive same-race peer relationships. However, family interaction played a meaningful role in their success, suggesting that supportive relationships for Black males at PWIs are a critical component to their achievement whether those relationships are with family or friends.

Differing from Williamson’s (2010) results, Strayhorn (2008) looked at data from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ; developed by C. Robert Pace, 1990) and concluded that Black men who socialized with peers from various races and ethnicities were likely to exhibit a stronger sense of belonging on campus. Campus engagement is known to be associated with academic success, a concept reinforced by the literature on Black males (Strayhorn, 2008). For example, Hébert (2002) conducted a four-year longitudinal case study examining five Black males at a predominantly White flagship institution in the southeastern U.S. The study investigated how Black males perceive their own levels of academic achievement, what relationships they found most supportive, and the impact of the campus on their successes and failures. Comparable to the participants in Williamson’s (2010), and Strayhorn’s (2008) studies, the men in Hébert’s (2002) study identified family and an integrated support group as factors positively influencing their academic success. These young men also revealed that their talents were recognized at an early age and nurtured by a mentor, often beginning in elementary school and persisting through postsecondary education, a factor that assisted in the cultivation of self-efficacy. Involvement in religious organizations is also connected to these findings on familial support. These students recalled church celebrations in honor of their educational accomplishments.

In addition to familial and peer support, Black men at PWIs do appear to embrace spirituality as a success factor. Herndon (2003) affirmed that Black college males receive support from various sources, including those that are academic, emotional, social, and financial. However, given the role of spirituality and religion in the Black community, the collegiate success of many African American males is inevitably connected to religious support. In examining the role of spirituality in reinforcing the persistence of Black male collegians, Herndon found prayer and worship were used as a means of coping, relieving stress, and facing racism. Church members provided guidance and encouragement, while spirituality offered structure for their lives. Based on Herndon’s (2003) findings, it can be inferred that Black male recipients of spiritual guidance and familial support are more likely to experience success.

The previous section offered a sampling of success-based empirical research on Black male collegians at PWIs. Apparent in the findings are the overwhelmingly non-cognitive factors associated with resilience, including spirituality. The ability to develop relationships was identified as a substantial success strategy. Relationship outcomes are complex and, when juxtaposed with the dynamics of an individual campus setting, become increasingly difficult to
predict. However, successful Black college men often find ways to leverage relationships to their advantage. In addition, confidence and a strong self-efficacy allowed the Black men in the reviewed studies to successfully engage in unwelcoming communities while developing and sustaining purposeful peer, familial, spiritual, and mentor relationships.

One theme that appears throughout the literature is the premise that the PWI campus ethos neglects the empirically proven needs of Black males. However, Museus (2011) found that some PWIs, specifically those described as “Generating Ethnic Minority Success (GEMS)” institutions, show considerably higher than average minority retention and graduation rates. According to Museus (2011), the GEMS colleges in his study possess salient networking principals and are proactive in creating a supportive environment for minority students that leads to positive outcomes. The features characteristic to GEMS colleges are comparable to those resulting from the long-standing mission and traditions of HBCUs, and show a similar impact on Black male success. The next section explores this context in detail, illuminating the literature on Black male success at HBCUs.

**BLACK MALE SUCCESS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Allen (1992) postulated that Black students, similarly to many individuals, are more successful in environments where they feel valued. Harper (2012) added that essential features separating successful Black males from their counterparts are encounters with individuals and motivational experiences of cultural pertinence. The 105 HBCUs in the United States enroll 11% and graduate nearly 20% of the total number of African American undergraduate students (Aud et al., 2012; Palmer & Wood, 2012). These institutions offer a campus ethos that is rich in collectivist cultural values, and maintain a cultural integrity evident in their engagement and support programming (Museus, 2011). However, according to Palmer and Wood (2012), Black male attainment at HBCUs has declined by 6% in a single decade (1997-2007), and is currently hovering at 29%, in contrast with the 57% graduation rate of female counterparts. While this disparity is sobering, there is an important story to be told by the remaining 29%—that of successful Black males attending HBCUs. This section seeks to understand this story by reviewing studies on Black male success at HBCUs.

While institutional settings differ, student needs endure. Similar to Black males at PWIs, collegians at HBCUs possess self-efficacy and seek opportunities to engage with the campus community; like their PWI counterparts, they identify protective factors, including familial and peer relationships, as being valuable (Flowers, 2012; Fountaine & Carter, 2012; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Fries-Britt, Burt, & Franklin, 2012; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). The strategies used by students at HBCUs and PWIs are generally comparable (Riggins, McNeal, & Herndon, 2008; Watson, 2006); however, their experiences diverge as the students at PWIs experience the psychological impact of racial battle fatigue, while those at HBCUs do not.

Fries-Britt, Burt, and Franklin (2012) conducted a qualitative study investigating the experiences and challenges of 44 Black males in STEM programs at HBCUs. Similar to Moore and colleagues (2003), the STEM majors in this study found peer interaction to be an indispensable factor in achieving success. Establishing strong relationships with faculty and administrators was also found to be critical to the persistence and graduation of these students. However, the need to “force” relationships with the faculty members was absent—students experienced ease in interacting with professors, who actually initiated contact with students. Also, the Black distancing practiced by the men in Williamson’s (2010) study was non-existent here. A comparative analysis of these studies revealed the tension experienced by students at PWIs. Entering STEM fields is a challenging endeavor; factoring in uninterested faculty only intensifies the struggle.

Flowers (2012) found through a qualitative case study of senior engineering majors at an HBCU that Black men too had strong self-efficacy; however, these young men indicated that this self-efficacy was influenced by the supportive nature of the institution and faculty. Men at the HBCU acknowledged that the deans of their respective programs, advisors, and faculty were engaged and often provided networking opportunities. They described how the availability of

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support programs assisted them in gaining the skills and ultimately the confidence they needed to achieve their academic goals. Similar to the studies by Williamson (2010) and Hébert (2002), Flowers' (2012) research revealed that family was a major resource for students. And much like the men in Herndon's (2003) work, many of these men expressed a strong spiritual base, acknowledging the role God played in their academic talent.

According to Riggins, McNeal, and Herndon's (2008) qualitative study of 13 Black men at HBCUs, prayer was used as a coping strategy in support of persistence and achievement. These findings align with those of Herndon (2003); however, Riggins and associates' (2008) study resulted in two unique outcomes. First, HBCU students were comfortable enough in their settings to verbally express spirituality, engaging in faith-based conversations with peers and faculty. Second, these men attested that although they called on a higher power in times of need, they believed themselves to be solely responsible for particular life outcomes, whether positive or negative. These men valued their self-efficacy, and were comparable to the participants in Bridges' (2010) study, with one divergence—they supplemented their talents with prayer.

Watson's (2006) quantitative study also gathered data about spirituality and its relationship to the educational experiences and survival/success of 97 Black males at an HBCU. Watson (2006) found that spirituality was important to success; however, the participants' interpretations of survival differed. At PWIs, Black male collegians employed prayer to navigate a racist environment and the academic life of college. The men in Watson's (2006) research, however, primarily prayed for guidance and support in managing aspects of traditional college life (relationships, academics, and finances)—areas with established institutional support mechanisms at the HBCU.

Supporting the idea that institutional support is a vital feature of Black male success, Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) conducted a study examining the outcomes of 11 academically underprepared men enrolled in an educational support program. The men in Palmer and Strayhorn's (2008) study graduated despite their academic shortcomings, and self-efficacy was found to be a major factor in the attainment of this group. The 11 men reported that the program helped them to become accountable for their success, to concentrate and properly organize themselves, and to "develop and display an affinity for a major" (p. 136). Similarly, Fountaine and Carter (2012) studied one HBCU's implementation of a bridge program, which was designed to support academically underprepared students by implementing the strengths-based educational model, as opposed to traditional remediation efforts. The results of this quantitative study indicated that all 233 participants experienced positive gains in academic achievement. The findings from these studies speak volumes to the importance of support programming for Black men who are underprepared entering postsecondary education. The participants from each study reported having confidence in their abilities, similar to the academically prepared participants in the Bridges (2010), Harper (2009), and Hébert (2002) studies at PWIs.

Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) conducted a qualitative study to identify experiences that challenged and supported the academic success of 34 students: 19 enrolled at an HBCU and 15 from a PWI. The majority of the HBCU cohort had transferred from a PWI after being dissatisfied with that school. While Black men attending PWIs tend to fare better academically than their often underprepared HBCU counterparts; Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) observed comparable levels of success for each cohort (PW1 and HBCU), and greater levels of satisfaction among the HBCU students. This finding is generally representative of the literature reviewed, suggesting that institutional support has great potential to yield academic success for Black males.

Black male success is prevalent across institutional types. However, although the HBCU offers Black men a more supportive and engaging environment, which allows this population to become fully integrated academically and socially, some HBCU campus cultures are hostile toward particular Black men (Palmer & Wood, 2012). As stated previously, Black men are not a monolithic group and neither are HBCUs one-size-fits-all institutions. For instance, Strayhorn and Scott (2012) examined the experiences of Black gay men at HBCUs, looking specifically at the challenges this group confronts, both internally and externally. Gay Black men encounter
homophobia, campus-wide invisibility and marginalization, and in some instances a lack of familial support, as well as issues of identification. Similar to the men in Williamson's (2010) study, these students are routinely subjected to Black distancing on the campuses of conservative HBCUs. According to Strayhorn and Scott (2012), Black gay men at HBCUs often view the college environment as unwelcoming and feel that the historical religious foundation of such institutions perpetuates a conservative campus climate. Harper and Gasman (2008) concur, as their study on sexual orientation, self-expression, and subordination found a distinct political conservatism at some HBCUs.

The experiences and coping strategies for these men at HBCUs are, ironically, similar to those of Black men at PWIs. Homosexual males at HBCUs navigate the homophobic and heterosexist campus communities by establishing relationships with external peers. In addition, many of them practice psychological and physical distancing—electing to live off-campus, and becoming engaged with external community-based LGBT organizations. Strayhorn and Scott (2012), and Harper and Gasman (2008) reported that the support these men garner outside the walls of their respective institutions assist in their persistence and achievement. Next is a brief discussion of resilience theories, highlighting the use of the concept of resilience in educational research on Black male students.

**The Educational Context of Resilience Theory**

Despite varied definitions of resilience employed by theorists and researchers alike, prevalent in numerous definitions is the identification of resilience as a process. Ungar (2008) and Rutter (2007) distinguished resilience as a process of “navigating” oneself toward, and then using, a particular resource; therefore, resilience is not considered to be an individual personality trait, given the influence of both internal and external systems in this ongoing process. Morales and Trotman (2011) provided a more useful definition of academic resilience, aligning accurately with the experiences of successful Black males when they describe the concept as “the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles” (p. 8).

The notion of resilience, which encompasses both risk and positive adaptation, provides an anti-deficit approach that seeks to examine the process of adjustment or recovery through the reduction of risk. This is accomplished by the application of protective factors (Luthar, 2006; Rutter, 1987) associated with the individual, the family, and the social environment (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, 2006; Olsson et al., 2003; Werner, 1993). Identified by Werner (1989) as *dispositional attributes*, individual- and family-level protective factors are considered to be the first line of defense against adversity. Protective factors associated with the social environment exist primarily in schools and neighborhoods where students may tap into the expertise of teachers or administrators and supportive relationships with peers in order to foster resilience (Garmezy, 1991; Olsson et al., 2003).

Examining the resilience of Black male collegians, particularly from the perspective of a qualitative methodology, allows for a deep understanding of the internal and external adversity that threatens educational attainment among this student population. Moreover, resilience studies offer the opportunity to elicit the voices of Black men themselves to provide explanations of how they might navigate adversity in a specific cultural context. Morales and Trotman (2011) noted that resilient students are the “statistically elite, those who avoid the dreadful educational outcomes associated with a historically underprivileged socio-economic status” (p. 1). By this definition, then, the academically successful Black males examined in the literature have defied the statistics. Many of the ills that plague Black men today are associated with a lower socioeconomic status inherited from the history of American slavery, an impediment that has, unfortunately, become ingrained in the nation’s social fiber and in its institutions. Therefore, understanding resilience allows researchers, educators, policymakers, and parents to consider a new theoretical basis on which to build effective studies, public policy, and educational programs to further support Black male academic success.

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The academic resilience of historically underrepresented minorities in K-12 and postsecondary educational settings has been a focal point of study for many educational researchers (American Psychological Association Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Brown, 2008; Cavazos et al., 2010; Castro et al., 2011; Ceja, 2004; Floyd, 1996; Ford, Kokjie, & Lewis, 1996; Gonzales, 2003; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Howell, 2004; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Morales, 2008, 2010; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2011; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). The influence of race, gender, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, and language all add variation to research that seeks to understand resilience. In a study focused on understanding resilience in Black adolescents, the American Psychological Association’s task force study (2008) indicated that it is valuable for resilience studies to acknowledge the “cultural integrity” of Black teens because their experiences are unique to their position in society. Therefore, the review of empirical work in this section highlights literature focused on the resilience of underrepresented groups within varied postsecondary educational settings. This should provide insight into new and creative means of exploring resilience in underrepresented Black males, helping us to understand the implications of such research.

One example of the contextual resilience of minorities can be found in the quantitative exploratory study of 131 Black urban teenagers conducted by Miller and MacIntosh (1999). This study examined the impact of “culturally unique” protective factors, such as racial socialization and racial identity, on the participants’ educational resilience. According to Miller and MacIntosh (1999), Black parents attempt to edify their children on how to circumnavigate racialized milieus, while simultaneously instilling them with a sense of pride and confidence in their racial identity. In other words, these parents paradoxically teach their children how to react given the likelihood of marginalization based on their race as they encourage them to embrace being Black. Although Miller and MacIntosh (1999) did not focus on college students, their study did explore the general impact of cultural factors on academic resilience, finding that racial identity affected academic resilience, while racial socialization was not statistically significant. Similarly to Miller and MacIntosh (1999), Brown (2008) sought to examine the impact of racial socialization and support systems on the academic resilience of 154 Black students at a midwestern PWI. In Brown’s (2008) quantitative study, however, academic resilience was positively associated with racial socialization as well as with various support systems. The students’ extended families and adult members of their communities were reported to be the primary providers of racial socialization. In tandem, these studies demonstrate how a racial context may be employed to better understand the resilience of Black students.

Using a dataset comprised of 1,213 African American males from the High School and Beyond Survey, Wilson-Sadberry and others (1991) sought to quantitatively examine various influences on the degree attainment. Specifically, the researchers examined how educational preparation, counselors, and family and peers impacted resilience, and found that socioeconomic status, familial and peer influence, educational preparation, and postsecondary plans all positively influenced Black male students’ ability to attain a college education. They also discovered that educational plans, which are a factor related to emotional intelligence (EQ), were a stronger predictor of resilience than socioeconomic status. An additionally strong predictor revealed in the study was fatherly influence. More than 75% of the Black men attending college linked the decision to obtain a degree to their fathers. These findings speak to the strength of family and individual-level protective factors that encourage self-efficacy, and therefore resilience, in Black men (Olsson et al., 2003).

CONCLUSION

This literature review builds on Allen’s and Harper’s work, providing an examination of extant research investigating various factors promoting Black male academic success at PWIs and HBCUs. Some African American men do succeed in college despite insurmountable odds, providing a meaningful contrast to themes presented by deficit literature on Black male collegians.
Black male student leaders on campus are resilient, successfully identifying, and deploying protective factors such as peers, mentors, and faculty for support and guidance (Harper, 2012). Many thriving Black men leverage institutional academic assistance and support programs and services to strengthen their academic capabilities. They seek out family members to provide resources and encouragement, and tap into spirituality for inner strength. Regardless of the racial microaggression and political conservatism characteristic to the campuses where they study and live, many Black men find ways to become involved and engaged as student leaders.

Throughout, the literature asserts that Black men must exert exhaustive psychic energy to succeed in postsecondary education; however, through an amalgamation of coping strategies, and drawing on strong self-efficacy, these men persist, achieve, and attain. The trends hold true among Black men at minority serving institutions (MSIs) as well. Few studies have taken place within this institutional context, despite the number of Black students enrolled on MSI campuses, an omission that renders these institutions and the impact they have on the lived experiences of the students they serve ambiguous. While the discourse on the resilience associated with Black male undergraduate success is gaining momentum, there is still a paucity of research examining Black male post-baccalaureate degree attainment, and the data on Black male graduate student attainment remain disconcerting. Although Black graduate students accounted for 20% of approximately 753,000 graduate degree recipients in 2010, Black men accounted for only 3.4%. In 2010, the graduate degree completion rate of African American men was an abysmal 28% (masters) and 35% (doctorate/professional degree), compared to the 72% and 65% graduate attainment rate of their Black female counterparts for masters and doctorate/professional degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to many researchers, the racialized experiences of minority graduate students parallel those of their undergraduate counterparts attending PWIs (Clark et al., 2012; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). However, there is insufficient knowledge regarding successful Black male graduate educational experiences. Future research on the postsecondary success and resilience of Black men should seek to examine the educational experiences of the population at varying institutions, inclusive of geographic location, level of degree, and program of study, with a particular focus on the impact of collegiate racial climate and negative stereotypes on the resilience experiences of Black men. In conclusion, Harper (2012) highlighted the need for scholarship examining the success process by stating:

Most surprising and most disappointing is that nearly every student interviewed said it was the first time someone had sat him down to ask how he successfully navigated his way to and through higher education, what compelled him to be engaged in student organizations and college classrooms, and what he learned that could help improve achievement and engagement among Black male collegians. (p. 15)

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Learning from Success: How Original Research on Academic Resilience Informs what College Faculty Can do to Increase the Retention of Low Socioeconomic Status Students

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Abstract

Utilizing resilience theory and original research conducted on fifty academically resilient low socioeconomic status students of color, this article presents specific objectives and values institutions of higher learning can adopt and emphasize to increase the retention and graduation of their most statistically at-risk students. Major findings and suggestions include: constantly build students’ self-efficacy; help students realistically appraise their own strengths and weaknesses; encourage help seeking tendencies; and provide clear linkages between academic success and future economic security.

According to a recent report from National Center for Education Statistics, by the year 2022, White and Asian students will increase their attendance on college campuses by 7%, whereas the rate will be 26% for African American students and 27% for Hispanics, two groups with disproportionately higher poverty rates (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). These students will continue to make up larger and larger percentages of students on college campuses nationwide. While these can be viewed as positive and exciting forecasts, they bring with them new sets of challenges.

Given the changing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics of the United States, as well as shifts in expectations as to who seeks a college degree, a majority of institutions of higher education are struggling with one essential question: How do we retain and graduate greater numbers of ethnic minorities and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? The consequences of not meeting this challenge can be viewed on both a macro and micro level. From a societal perspective, unemployment rates, reliance on public social service agencies, incarceration rates, and America’s place in the global hierarchy are all either directly or indirectly linked with the successful education of working class and poor students, many of whom are ethnic minorities. On a more local level, as more and more first generation college students enter colleges across the country (Jehangir, 2010), institutions are increasingly recognizing the value of effectively meeting their needs (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003), for if they don’t, current and future enrollment targets may not be met. Furthermore, those with the most influence over the potential success of these students, college faculty, already acknowledge the need for, and desire, effective ways of meeting their needs (Erisman & Looney 2007).

The difficulties colleges face in effectively teaching and graduating lower socioeconomic status students, often from ethnic minority backgrounds, continues to be a pressing issue. However, the issue is not a new one. Back in the early 1970s K. Patricia Cross (1971) famously talked specifically of the inability of colleges to adjust to the needs of the changing student bodies of the time. Since then, the numbers of poorer and first generation college students have only increased. Furthermore, many noted researchers in the field still acknowledge that not enough is known about how low socioeconomic college students experience and manage college life (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

The rest of this paper will further define and explore the parameters of these issues and then utilize original research on academically resilient students to provide specific approaches faculty can adopt to increase the degree of resilience and persistence among first generation college students. These suggestions will be categorized and explained, then justified through related research literature.

Keywords: Academic resilience, Student retention, At-risk students, Minority student performance
1. The Problem
Currently, only a little more than half (56%) of students beginning college any given fall will earn their degrees within six years, and these percentages are even lower for African Americans and Hispanics, 39% and 49% respectively (NCES, 2013). There are similar variations in college graduation based on socioeconomic status, with poorer students consistently graduating at lower rates than their wealthier peers (Fox, Connolly & Snyder, 2005). Perhaps even more troubling, even for students of similar academic ability, those from poorer economic backgrounds still suffer significantly lower graduation rates that their equally academically talented peers. For example, in a longitudinal study, poor students who scored high on an eighth grade mathematics assessment graduated college at a 29% clip, whereas students with similar math scores from middle income families were at 47%, and high income families at 74% (Fox et al., 2005). There are questions and debates as to exactly why poor and ethnic minority students continue to graduate college at lower rates, but what virtually everyone agrees on is that colleges and universities can and should do more to address the issue.

The goal of increasing retention rates for ethnic minority students, especially those from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic latter, has remained a major concern for institutions of higher learning throughout the United States (Hill & Woodward, 2013; O’Keeffe, 2013; Seidman, 2007). Furthermore, the fact that, despite national economic highs and lows, the earning of a college degree is still the most direct route to escaping poverty (Perna, 2005), means it is imperative that we continue to pursue ways of increasing college graduation, particularly for our poorest and most vulnerable students.

There has been a good amount of research exploring and documenting student adjustment to college life and retention (Astin 1993; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Tinto 1993), as well as research specifically focused on low socioeconomic students and their transitions to college (Kraemer, 1997; Morales, 2012; Terenzini, 1994). The bulk of these studies relied on quantitative regression analysis to isolate which variables correlated with eventual graduation (see Bai & Pan, 2010, for an extant example). These works have often successfully met their goals. However, there has not been as much work done on specifically how poor students have managed to excel despite stressors which often derail others with similar backgrounds. This is where resilience theory and research can play a major role.

2. Resilience Theory
Essentially, educational resilience is the statistically anomalous academic achievement of students who possess and confront “risk factors” that predict failure for most students from similar circumstances (Morales & Trotman, 2004). These students were appropriately termed by Gerardi (1990) as the “the statistical elite” (p. 403). Unlike many other perspectives on the academic performance of poor students, resilience theory takes an up close and personal look at those students who have succeeded, and then asks why and how?

By applying a resilience paradigm, colleges and universities can attempt to enhance and replicate the attributes and conditions that successful poor students have identified as critical to their success. Another benefit of resilience theory is that, because it looks at success over time, the longer term benefits of particular attributes and conditions can be assessed. Finally, the resilience model allows for a sense of how multiple protective factors can work collectively, supplementing each other as they contribute to the success of the student. See Morales (2010), for detailed analysis of how protective factor “clusters” facilitate resilience.

Initially, the resilience concept was applied to positive mental health outcomes despite psychological stressors (Garmenzy, 1991; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982), rather than educational outcomes. However, it gradually evolved as lens through which unlikely academic success could be viewed as well (Wang & Gordan, 1994).

In conceptualizing “resilience” there has been debate as to whether it should be viewed as an outcome or a process (McCubbin, 2001). For the sake of this research, the term “resilience” is a broad umbrella concept, capturing both the outcome and process of exceptional academic achievement despite the presence of potentially virulent risk factors.

Though academic resilience as a field of study has recently become more prominent in the social science literature (Conchas, 2006; Hartley, 2013; Hawkins, & Mulkey, 2005; Kitano & Lewis, 2005, this focus on positive outcomes remains minuscule compared to all of the work still being done on student failure (Morales & Trotman, 2011). This is where resilience studies and theory distinguish themselves and can contribute to a better understanding of the whole picture when it comes to the academic performance of poor and ethnic minority students. Despite the daunting statistics discussed earlier, the fact remains that a percentage of students do beat the odds and exceed expectations. Resilience theory is based on the reasoning that if we learn how at-risk students succeed, we can better...
help those with the potential to succeed. Consequently, a brief overview of the resilience paradigm and theoretical construct would be helpful.

Kitano and Lewis (2005) articulated the four dynamics most often utilized in resilience theory: risk factors, protective factors, vulnerability areas, and compensatory strategies. Risk factors refer to any (usually environmental) dynamics which serve to, or have the potential to, negatively impact an individual on his/her path toward academic success. As examples, these may include inferior schools, lack of access to technology, or insufficient funds for test preparation or quality textbooks. To some extent these are always present, because by definition, resilient students face significant risk factors on their journeys toward educational achievement. Protective factors on the other hand serve to offset or mitigate the risk factors and come in a variety of forms as well. Examples are caring teachers, mentors, quality schools, and inspiring parents/role models.

A vulnerability area is a particular issue that manifests as problematic in a given situation. For example, while a risk factor may be lack of access to honors courses, the resulting deficiency in that student’s college application would be the vulnerability area. Compensatory strategies are protective factors in action, specific actions that alleviate or even defeat risk factors and vulnerability areas. An effective letter of reference to a college admissions office documenting all of the obstacles the student has overcome would be an example.

It is through a resilience lens, and based on original research, that specific protective factors and compensatory strategies will be presented. These are suggestions, attitudes, and values that colleges in general, and faculty in particular, can adopt to increase the degree to which they create an environment conducive to resilience.

There are myriad ways to increase retention, and many of them are being attempted at colleges across the country. There are scholarships to offset the need to work, summer bridge programs, freshmen seminars, student affairs programming, mentoring groups, learning communities, comprehensive tutoring, and supplemental instruction initiatives, just to name a few. Many of these approaches work and should be continued, however they usually exist outside of where students are spending the vast majority of their formal learning time, the classroom.

What often gets far less attention than it should is what faculty can do in their classrooms, on a daily, weekly, and semester basis, to increase retention and promote academic resilience.

3. Method

The tenets and suggestions proposed below are based upon original research conducted on fifty ethnic minority academically resilient students. A sample population of 50 is usually high for a primarily qualitative study, and yielded a rich and robust array of findings.

Students were recruited from a variety of institutions: private universities (n=26), public universities (n=16), and community colleges (n=8) and all met the following prerequisites at the time of the interviews:

- Had parents with limited educational backgrounds (HS graduates or below)
- Self-identified as an ethnic minority.
- Had completed a minimum of 30 college credits with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 (using a 4.0 point scale).

Based on ubiquitous data indicating that ethnic minority students from poor backgrounds are statistically less likely to attend and succeed in college (US Dept. of Education, 2013), all students who meet the above criteria can be deemed “academically resilient.” That is, their academic performance far exceeded what would have been predicted given their statistical starting points.

Thirty-one of the students were female and nineteen were male. Twenty one identified as African American, twenty as Hispanic/Latino, five as Biracial, two as Haitian American, one as Jamaican American, and one as Guyanese American.

In undertaking the research, ultimate goals were accuracy, completeness and data saturation. Completeness is the principle of adding interviews until one is satisfied with the level of understanding for the given phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The saturation point is when additional interviews add little to what has already been learned (Ely, 1991; Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Through fulfillment of both completeness and data saturation, the researcher is confident that the findings present are accurate.

In accordance with the work of Rubin and Rubin (1995) topical semi-structured interviews were conducted. The topic was the students’ academic resilience and their mental states throughout that process, and structure was provided by an interview protocol used for all students during their initial interviews. Consequently, while all
students were asked the same initial questions, follow-up interviews were somewhat unique and based on specific interviewee responses from the previous rounds.

Each interviewee underwent a minimum of three separate interviews. Each interview was approximately ninety minutes in length. The first two interviews primarily gathered data and explored broad themes related to the students’ academic resilience, while subsequent interviews were highly focused member checks on specific areas of importance and concern. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed verbatim. During and after each interview supplementary notes were recorded. These notes were an attempt to capture the researcher’s own thoughts, as well as nuances not evident in an audio recording.

In conducting this research data collection and analysis were distinct processes that were closely intertwined. Consistent with the qualitative research norms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) these two activities were done continuously until data saturation was achieved. Throughout the actual data analysis process, and in accordance with the work of Bogdan & Biklen (1982) coding categories and concepts were created, and emerging themes identified.

All interview transcriptions became part of the field log. Ely (1991) describes the log as a cohesive history of the investigation. Additional components of the log include the supplementary field notes previously mentioned, and personal reflections and descriptions. These writings were then used to write lengthier writings called analytic memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The analytic memos allowed for the ultimate synthesis of all the components of field log.

Finally, trustworthiness was a key objective during the research process. For the qualitative researcher, trustworthiness refers to assurance that the research activities are instituted fairly, and that the conclusions yielded from the research represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people being studied (Ely, 1991). A variety of methods were used to promote trustworthiness, including: triangulation, coherence of themes, peer de-briefing, and member checking. It is the belief and hope of the researcher that what is presented here is as accurate and precise as is reasonably possible.

4. Research Question

The findings from the above research were brought to bear on the following question:

- What can faculty do in their classrooms to facilitate the resilience and retention of low socio-economic students?

The presentation of strategies and suggestions, like those that follow, are essential given that most college faculty have never received training on how to teach, let alone how to teach students from varied economic and ethnic backgrounds. Unlike the certification required for k-12 teachers, there is none for college faculty. They are hired based on their expertise in their academic discipline, and then expected to excel at teaching, with little or no professional development or support. Given this reality, it is no wonder many are confounded and dismayed when their students continually struggle despite sincere efforts by both parties.

5. Findings

The findings below describe some of the specific ways that higher education institutions encouraged the resilience of the students in the study, and ways that other institutions can also accomplish this goal. More important than the specific means, the broader categories are what colleges and universities should be targeting. Different institutions have different cultures, missions, and student bodies, consequently how various institutions adopt and implement the strategies below may differ as well.

The broad categories of suggestions that follow are: **Constantly Build Students’ Self-Efficacy; Help Students Realistically Appraise their Own Strengths and Weaknesses; Encourage Help-Seeking Tendencies; and Provide Clear Linkages between Academic Success and Future Economic Security.** A detailed look at each, with select research support where appropriate, follows.

6. Constantly Build Students’ Self-efficacy

Strong feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), closely related to the concept of an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966), is perhaps the most commonly cited attribute of academically resilient students (Morales & Trotman, 2011). Students’ beliefs in their ability to effect outcomes is paramount. Increased senses of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control lead to more effort expended on academic tasks, while a lack of self-efficacy (an external locus of control) tends to reduce the amount of effort expended.
Self-efficacy was among the most commonly cited valuable dispositional attributes of the students studied. A full 92% of the students studied identified the belief in their own ability to affect change as a key component of their success. While this is not a particularly unique finding, the question of how to encourage and build self-efficacy in others is an ongoing and elusive challenge.

According to the seminal work of Bandura (1977) self-efficacy derives from four primary sources of information: Performance accomplishment (having been successful in the past), Vicarious experience (hearing about others who have been successful), Verbal persuasion (encouragement), and Physiological states (emotional arousal). The first two, performance accomplishment and vicarious experience, appear to have been the most useful and efficacious means to self-efficacy for the students studied. Consequently, some specific strategies college faculty can engage in to bolster self-efficacy follow:

- In designing their syllabi, faculty can begin their semester with relatively straightforward and clear assignments that lend themselves to direct correlation between effort and outcome. In other words, assignments that are relatively simple, as long as ample effort is expended.

Students in the study noted that early success in their classes, as well as a correlation between their efforts and that success, reinforced their confidence and increased the degree to which they believed effort would be rewarded. Examples of assignments that appeared to meet these criteria include: identifying and summarizing relevant newspaper articles, defining lists of vocabulary words germane to a particular academic discipline, and reading a text passage and answering comprehension questions. Note that these assignments do not require a lot of additional outside knowledge or resources, nor abstract thinking, but rather are heavily effort based. This does not mean students should never engage in critical/abstract thinking, but rather that early assignments that minimize the need for these appeared to build an authentic sense of confidence in relation to the particular course. Once students believed their efforts were being rewarded, they put forth more energy on future, more challenging tasks.

- While addressing students, faculty can talk about and promote previous students who have worked hard and succeeded, as well as how these students managed to do so.

Students in the study benefitted from professors who “demystified” what it takes to succeed in their courses by describing students who may have initially struggled, but ultimately succeeded. In addition to acquiring specific insights into what it takes to succeed, the possibility of success became more realistic. Specific suggestions of what to do also helped students guide their energies in fruitful directions. As one student reported:

A lot of times I want to work hard, I really do, but I’m not sure what to do. Like I will spend a bunch of time reading a chapter, and I’ll barely remember it, or I remember the wrong stuff when the test comes….Professor (O’Leary) helped because she told me exactly what I needed to do to do good in her class, she told us that the only stuff we needed to know from the book was stuff that she covered in class and that we didn’t have to spend time on any of the stuff from the book she didn’t also cover. So I would take really good notes and then compare to the book and study just that stuff… I got my first A in that class after she said that, and I kept on doing it. It felt great to know what to do and then to just do it.” (Lamar).

Here we see that for students who do not have, nor have access to, “insider” academic knowledge, simple instructions and directions can make all the difference.

- Building on the notions above, professors who described their own struggles with, and ultimate mastery of, their academic disciplines were particularly impactful.

These professors humbled themselves, essentially closing the social/intellectual distance between them and their students. The result was described by one student in the following way, “When Professor (Smith) talked about failing out of his first college when he was nineteen, it really made me think about how people can take detours in life and stuff, and still get where they want to be…he made it clear that just because you mess up (it) doesn’t mean that’s the end of the game…I can still do it” (Angel). Ultimately, these expressions of humility and hardship can help students buy into the possibilities of their own successes. This can be particularly valuable for first generation college students who often view academia as a strange and foreign land, a place in which, deep down inside, they may not feel they belong.

- Another commonly reported characteristics of professors who helped encourage self-efficacy in their students is that they provided frequent, specific, and detailed feedback on as many assignments as possible, especially early in the semester.

Often students increased their effort output, as well as their belief in the value of that output, in response to knowing specifically when they either excelled or missed the mark. Consistent feedback helped students link effort with outcome and guided them on what to do next. As discussed earlier, a common, and frustrating, conundrum for many
potentially resilient students is that they are ready and willing to work hard, but are not knowledgeable and/or academically sophisticated enough to know exactly what to do. Consistent and detailed feedback helps solve this problem. One student’s words typified many of the resilient students’ grateful reactions to these sorts of criticism, “it (the detailed feedback) was like a map, it kept me on track and let me know that I was making progress, like that what I was doing was working, or that I needed to change, that’s valuable information. In some of my other classes, I had like no clue where I was, I was kind of lost, and it made me not want to work as hard.” (Lucy).

- Another faculty approach which appeared to bolster self-efficacy was the provision of choice when it came to course assignments.

Many students expressed a sense of empowerment when they worked on an assignment or topic that they chose. For many of the students, choice often led to ownership, which encouraged effort and responsibility. A student’s discussion of a poetry professor who allowed her to use rap music lyrics in her final analysis paper exemplifies this well:

At first I was shocked that she even let me do it, and I thought it would be kind of easy. But it wasn’t. Yeah, she let me do it, but I still had to analyze it the same way as with any of the poems, she wanted us to dig deep and make connections with other stuff…. I didn’t mind doing the work because I chose it, it was mine… I worked harder on that paper than on anything I have ever done in school, and I’m also most proud of it. (Deborah)

- Another way faculty enhanced self-efficacy was by emphasizing the developmental and nonlinear nature of academic competence and achievement. These faculty helped students learn by their “failures” by stressing learning as a growth process rather than an either you have it or you don’t construct.

Although they did not use these terms, essentially the students were benefitting from professors who viewed academic competence with what researcher Carol Dweck refers as a “growth mindset” (2006). In her research, Dweck found that students who are told they excel because of innate intelligence (a fixed entity) do not do as well and are not as academically courageous as those who are told they excel because of effort (a malleable, incremental “growth” mindset”). This ties directly to self-efficacy, for theoretically while one does not control a “fixed entity” one can control effort and gradual growth, two pillars of self-efficacy.

7. Help Students Realistically Appraise their own Strengths and Weaknesses

A difficult, though essential, step in the process of becoming resilient is developing one’s ability to not only engage in honest self-reflection, but to respond to one’s conclusions in effective and meaningful ways. Here institutions of higher learning must walk a psychosocial tightrope. On one hand we are all told to provide praise and positive feedback to build self-esteem, but on the other we know that a distorted sense of self-competence can lead to personal and professional disaster. And as with many of the dynamics discussed here, the implications of failure in this area are often even more dire for students from households limited in economic and academic resources. These students often have safety nets with large holes, and cannot afford too many deviations from their paths.

Perspicacity and the realistic appraisal of strengths and weaknesses have been noted attributes of resilient students (Morales, 2008; Tough, 2012). These abilities are closely related to Goleman’s (1995) notion of “emotional intelligence,” where success is often more contingent on an individual’s ability to effectively manage one’s view of oneself as well as one’s emotions, rather than traditional measures of intelligence. These abilities, as well as the need for a degree of psychological maturity to successfully engage in metacognitive thinking and honest self-reflection, are key. These are skills and attributes important for anyone, but particularly valuable for potentially resilient students.

One of the most common phenomena reported by the students in the study was the unexpectedly intimidating nature of their initial exposure to college students from more affluent suburban schools who appeared to have been well-versed in academic culture and possessed vast amounts of academic background knowledge. See Gofen, (2009) for a discussion of cultural capital and the social value of this type of knowledge. When students are faced with this reality, it is those who are able to accept this disparity and address it that are most successful. The following quote from Jasmine, a scholarship awardee just beginning her college career at a prestigious institution, describes what many of the students reported. Here she is discussing how she felt on the first day of her European History class:

….the teacher was asking questions like what were the causes of World War I? And how did the war affect the economy?I had no idea… I didn’t even know who fought in that war….But other people knew this stuff. I got really heated (angry) I blamed the teacher, thinking the questions were stupid. I even skipped the next class as like a protest…but I couldn’t keep fooling myself. After I got my first few grades back I knew that I was going to have to change my approach…Once I accepted that this was a new level and that the same old effort and systems wouldn’t
work, things started to change. I committed to reading everything I could, asking lots of questions, and going for extra help at the writing lab...these were things I never had to do before, but it was a new level.

What would have happened had Jasmine not had the humility, courage and willingness to realistically assess the situation? Had she continued to blame the professors, rather than admit she was behind and would have to change, it is unlikely she would have succeeded and maintained the necessary GPA. For students like Jasmine in situations like this, there is little room for delusion or self-pity.

Faculty must help students acquire a realistic understanding of where they are via the content and skills of the particular course, and if relevant, what is required for related career paths.

Many of the suggestions below dovetail with those above regarding facilitating self-efficacy. As Tough (2012) indicates, those who are resilient not only learn from their mistakes or failings, but then act to address them.

- Professors who gave ungraded pretests and had individual, private conferences to discuss results, often helped students uncover areas for improvement without the stress and emotions tied to grades and evaluation. This approach worked best if done earlier in the semester, giving students time to address their issues.

- Some professors, usually in education courses, took time to discuss the students’ previous schooling experiences- specifically the quality and rigor of their precollege education. This helped the students reflect on what they may have missed out on without feeling as if they should be blamed for it. Initially, students often do not realize how lacking their precollege educations may have been, but through thoughtful conversation come to realize what they have missed out on, and more importantly the extent to which their prior schooling may have been deficient.

- Several students in the study talked about faculty members and/or counselors who worked with them to jointly identify skills/attributes/competencies that students would need to acquire/work on in order to be successful and meet their academic and professional goals. Many of the students remarked that this was the first time they ever, even informally, reflected explicitly on what they needed to do. Diana’s description of an experience doing a similar exercise illustrates the potential merit of this type of self-appraisal, “Nobody ever told me what I needed to do to get ahead, like not specifically. I mean, people always tell you ‘work hard’ and stuff, but nobody pointed to what I needed to do and change, like stuff I needed to get better at.”

Perhaps the most slippery of slopes come in helping students decide on a career or graduate school trajectory. Because first generation college students receive less guidance from home and take longer to earn their desired degrees (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) the role of the faculty member is especially crucial. However, often professors fear being perceived of as “dream killers,” so they may tacitly encourage students to pursue goals that are unrealistic and/or wastes of time and money. Obviously, we do want to encourage students, but what the students in the study found most useful were honest and frank discussions regarding how difficult something was and whether or not success was a realistic possibility. Remembering that often these students come from households that possess little knowledge of graduate education and the white collar job market, faculty and advisors have a special obligation to provide accurate and honest assessments.

One student in the study wanted to be a lawyer simply because he “liked the way it sounded.” He had a good but not great GPA, and disliked reading. A blunt and honest conversation with a criminal justice professor not only dissuaded him from that path, but opened up other career possibilities in the field that were more suited to the student’s abilities and interests. According to this student, had this conversation not taken place, he would have probably spent a great deal of time and money failing out of law school.

8. Encourage Help Seeking Tendencies

As presented earlier, resilience theory operates under a risk/protective factor model. Protective factors mitigate the potentially negative effects of risk factors. Here the role of colleges and universities is clear, promote/encourage help seeking tendencies where potentially resilient students take advantage of available resources (protective factors). In other words, encourage help-seeking tendencies.

In addition to assisting with academic progress, utilizing available assistance facilitates two well-known components of retention, academic and social integration in the college community (Kraemer, 1997; Nora & Rendon, 1996; Pascarella& Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini, & Pascarella, 1977). However, low socioeconomic students in particular are
often less likely to be engaged in outside class activities, such as study groups, and informal interactions with faculty (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Thus, once again facilitating these linkages is especially significant.

In terms of invaluable environmental protective factors students took advantage of, 90% of the students in the study identified college-bridge/scholarship programs, 72% caring college personnel, and 66% college sponsored tutoring initiatives. Given the amount and severity of risk factors with which many students have had to contend, students need these resources, thus encouraging more students to seek out and take advantage of available assistance is key. Below are some ways faculty can accomplish this.

- Writing centers/labs were of particular valuable for resilient students. Instead of waiting for students to struggle and suggesting or hoping they make an appointment, some faculty required students to take at least one paper to the writing lab before submitting it. Not only did this help improve student writing, but it made certain students knew where and how tutoring appointments took place. Many students only went to tutoring initially because they had to, but then made it part of their weekly or monthly routine. Faculty members who do not want to require it, could make a visit to the writing center worth extra points. Either way, getting students there initially often made a significant difference.

- Other faculty created assignments or activities that required students to attend university events and/or interact with available resources. Examples included: having to attend lectures then writing response papers; scavenger hunts, where they had to get signatures from a variety of university offices; and mandatory attendance at library orientations. Additionally, some faculty invited individuals from various college offices to do brief presentation in their classes, explaining what services were available and how to take advantage of them. All of these activities exposed students to available resources, resources students often heavily relied upon at later dates. Continuous integration of resources can eventually engender and encourage help seeking tendencies and the procurement of invaluable protective factors.

- Perhaps the most direct means of getting students to take advantage of resources came from faculty who continually offered themselves up as resources. Students reported greater “use” of professors who said things like, “Make sure to visit me during office hours,” “If you do really well in this class I can write you a letter of recommendation,” and “Remember, you pay the tuition, so it is our job to serve you.” These simple, yet important offerings often surprised students and gave them the encouragement they needed to actually seek out assistance. One student said, “I always looked at professors as above me, as people who didn’t want to be bothered by questions and stuff. But Dr. (Perez) told us to see him, even joked that he was lonely….it made it a lot easier, he was more approachable” (Lupe).

- Finally, some faculty were more proactive and explicit in their desire to connect students with resources, and took the initiative to actively connect students to people or programs from which they could benefit. Students reported professors who suggested specific scholarships, introduced them to academic support personnel, nominated them for awards, and even set up internships. Students benefited a great deal from this sort of active mentoring and guidance.


An essential, yet often overlooked aspect of the resilience process is the power of the presence of clear linkages between academic success (graduation) and economic security. This ties in closely with the earlier discussion on self-efficacy in that people are more likely to exert effort the more they believe that effort will indeed payoff. For potentially resilient students from poor, economically unstable backgrounds, the “payoff” is both literal and figurative.

Perhaps unlike many from middleclass and wealthier backgrounds, most resilient students view college not as a means to “enlightenment” nor becoming rich, but rather as a means to a modicum of financial security. Consequently, clear paths from graduation to career seemed to be of great motivational value. As a young woman who wanted to be an elementary teacher put it, “it was really only when I did my first practicum experience that I started to believe I could actually make a decent living teaching.” That is when I started working harder. It was like I could finally see the end, there it was, only a year or two away and I could be that teacher in the front of the class.” (Jessica)

Given an ever shifting and often daunting national employment picture, creating this connection between academic success and economic security can be a challenge. Additionally, many faculty may not think it is their job to do so, believing that is up to the career services offices. However, what is clear is that, regardless of where it came from,
the connection between academic performance and economic security proved to be an essential ingredient for resilience.

Below are some of the ways colleges and faculty have managed to create or at least strengthen this connection.

- Faculty who brought the work world into their classrooms made future employment a more realistic and tangible entity.

They did this in a number of ways, including: bringing in speakers from career fields related to their academic discipline; creating assignments where students had to explore concepts inherent to prospective careers; facilitating and/or promoting available internships, employment opportunities, and graduate assistantships; and pointing out the value or early and constant resume building. All of these activities helped strengthen the connection between school and the students’ futures.

10. Conclusion

Institutions and faculty seriously committed to improving how well they educate students from low socioeconomic and ethnic minority backgrounds must recognize that, while they are more similar than they are different, not all students are the same. Those from marginalized backgrounds often come from very different circumstances, and these circumstances significantly color both how they view themselves and their college educations. Consequently, an effective faculty member must often serve as the “cultural glue” that connects the students’ precollege experiences, values and norms with those of higher education and academia.

The faculty members who proved invaluable to the success of the resilient students studied were often highly attuned to their specific needs and modified their practices to better educate them. Studying and learning about what works is an essential first step for other faculty who want to move in that same direction.

It is unrealistic to expect all faculty to engage in all of the practices outlined above. What can be enacted depends on the academic discipline, the level of the students (freshmen, sophomore, etc.), the personality and expertise of the faculty member, and the mission of the institution. However, if a majority of faculty at a given institution operate in ways that promote and facilitate the resilience tenets described, then the overall climate and culture of the institution will foster greater success for the students who are often the most vulnerable and least likely to succeed.

A significant benefit is that the modifications discussed above are not heavily resource consuming. Shifts in attitudes, assignments, and emphasis can be achieved with little time and financial expenditures- utilizing structures, routines, and processes already in place. Most faculty are interested in adapting how they teach and learning about ways they may be more effective. There are few potentially worthwhile retention initiatives that can be enacted simply by sharing ideas or engaging in a brief series of professional development workshops.

It is also helpful to emphasize the practical and “bottom line” benefits of these types of initiatives. Given budgetary constraints, the increasing questioning of the ultimate value of a college degree, and increasing public scrutiny over college tuition and graduation rates, institutions of higher learning must retain and graduate as many students as possible. Not only is it clearly good for the students and their futures, but it can improve public perception significantly.

Finally, these approaches can be considered highly inclusive and beneficial to various types of students. It is logical to assume that an institution that demonstrates an ongoing commitment to fostering resilience will end up further facilitating the success of all of its students, not just those from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds.

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Directions to Brandeis University by car or public transportation:

**From the Mass. Turnpike (I-90) Eastbound**
Take exit 14 for I-95/Rt 128. After the toll, keep left for 95/128 North. While on ramp, exit immediately onto exit 24 for Route 30. Bear left onto Route 30. Turn right at first traffic light onto River Road. Follow this for 1.5 miles, where it turns into South Street. Brandeis is 0.5 miles ahead on the left of South Street.

**From the Mass. Turnpike (I-90) Westbound**
Take exit 15 for I-95/Rt 128 and Route 30. After the toll proceed straight for Route 30. Turn right at end of the ramp, and then right again at first traffic light onto Route 30. Turn left at next traffic light onto River Road. Follow this for 1.5 miles, where it turns into South Street. Brandeis is 0.5 miles ahead on the left of South Street.

**From I-95/Route 128 Northbound**
Take exit 24 for Route 30. Route 30 is one of several options at this exit, so follow signs carefully. Turn left at the top of the ramp onto Route 30. Turn right at the traffic lights. This is South Street, and Brandeis is two miles ahead on the left.

**By commuter rail:**
Commuter train service is available from Boston's North Station (Fitchburg / South Acton line) to the Brandeis/Roberts Station that borders the campus.

**ON CAMPUS:**
Stop at the booth at the main Brandeis University entrance* for a temporary parking permit for the Hassenfeld Building. (Meeting rooms at Hassenfeld include Lurias, Levine-Ross, Geller Conference Room, and Sherman Hall.)

Follow signs to “Lower Campus.” After the stop sign, follow the road past the Spingold Theater and Rose Art Museum. The Hassenfeld parking lot (H Lot) will be on the left, just before the road becomes a one way street.

Once you have parked, look along the main campus road for the blue awning of the Faculty Club. It is just to the right of the walkway to Hassenfeld. The Hassenfeld Conference Center will be the first building on the left.

*If the main booth/gatehouse is not open when you arrive, cars should proceed to the parking and safety office for a permit. Follow signs toward “Upper Campus.” Take the first driveway on the right to the parking and safety office. To get to Hassenfeld from the parking and safety office, follow the one-way loop road around the Upper Campus (turn right out of the driveway to the parking & safety office area). Just as the road becomes two-way again, pull into the parking lot on the right. Overview parking is just past the Spingold Theater building on the right, called the “Theater” lot (T Lot).

Campus Map Link: [http://www.brandeis.edu/about/visiting/directions.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/about/visiting/directions.html)
Weather Cancellation Memo

TO: Members of Brandeis' Think Tanks
RE: Meeting Cancellations

With all of the tumultuous weather we are known to have each winter in New England, we know the importance of a weather emergency cancellation plan. In general, we will try to hold meetings as scheduled unless any of the following conditions occur:

• Driving is likely to be hazardous;
• Attendance is likely to be low; or,
• The meeting venue is closed.

Once we have decided to cancel a meeting, we will send each of you an email. We will also post a message to the homepage of the Center for Youth and Communities: http://cyc.brandeis.edu.

We look forward to seeing you between storms!