

A CASE STUDY OF C5 GEORGIA: UNDERSTANDING HOW ONE COLLEGE ACCESS
PROGRAM PROMOTES ACCESS TO COLLEGE FOR STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME
BACKGROUNDS

by

NICOLE SHAUB COOK

(Under the Direction of Rosemary Phelps)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a college access program for students from low-income backgrounds was promoting access to postsecondary education. The study used a case study methodology to explore the experiences of seven student participants in the program and seven adult stakeholders affiliated with the program. The impetus for this study came from the paucity of research available exploring or explaining how college access programs function to promote access, and from a social justice imperative to create equitable access for all students to postsecondary education. Data revealed that participants in the study felt that three types of interventions within the program were promoting access to college for student participants. Those interventions included providing social and cultural capital in five ways. The five themes are creation of a supportive network that facilitates success, building resilience through experiential learning, providing students with critical connections, promoting college readiness through exposure to collegiate environments and skills, and structuring program components over time to produce college-qualified students. These themes provided a foundation for recommending future research in the field of college access and making

recommendations for current college access programs and advocates in the field of college access work.

INDEX WORDS: College access programs, Students from low-income backgrounds, Postsecondary education, Social capital, Cultural capital, College access, Underrepresented students

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2014

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the young people in the United States who believe college could be in their futures, but who face obstacles to that goal. In particular, it is dedicated to students who do not have the resources to help overcome those obstacles. This study is also dedicated to the tireless advocates for these students, advocates who are working as school counselors, social workers, or community activists, often at personal sacrifice. I hope this study is one step forward for all students and advocates in creating an equitable path to college for students in the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the people who have helped me become a counselor, advocate, and scholar. Without them, I would not have completed this journey.

First, I am grateful to the University of Georgia Counseling and Student Personnel Services faculty. My professors have been challenging and brilliant, helpful and fun. I feel that I have become a lifelong advocate for social justice issues because of my time here, but also a scholar with the ability to think critically and engage in the world of scholarship and research.

My dissertation committee has been incredibly supportive. My chair, Dr. Rosemary Phelps, has been patient, helpful, and wise in guiding me through the process. Dr. Diane Cooper has been a supporter and role model from the first class I took with her, and Dr. Natoya Haskins has been helpful with tips, reviews, and phone calls, not to mention tips on navigating motherhood while dissertating! Finally, Dr. Andy Wilson has been a true supporter of and advocate for me.

I must say a special thanks to my Ph.D. cohort, without whom I would not have completed this program. Jennifer, Bre, Kim, Christy, Erik, Malti, Nathan, and Chris, you have been friends, inspirations and fellow scholars. I feel privileged to have been in a cohort with such amazing, intelligent, and wonderful people. I never imagined it would be such a journey, but the best part of the journey has been walking it together.

I also want to thank my family of origin for their modeling and support of higher education. My parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and nieces have cheered me along the entire way, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I love that I have a family where we

can discuss doctoral research around the holiday dinner table, and I thank you for supporting me in my sometimes crazy dreams.

I embarked on my Ph.D. program the week before I married my husband Charles, and gained a stepdaughter Amelia. I am grateful to Charles and Amelia for seeing me through the program, sacrificing endless hours of my time for this goal. I will never forget the day I came home from work, and they were holding a poster that congratulated me on passing comps – I felt so supported and celebrated. My beautiful daughter Isabelle deserves a unique and lovely thanks, as she spent her early days of existence suffering through comprehensive exams, and spent much of her infancy sitting beside me while I wrote this dissertation. I never imagined how much I could love a little person, and I hope by completing this process, I have provided her with a model for the passion, engagement, and reward that can come from lifelong learning. Thank you Charles, Amelia, and Isabelle, for making my dissertation a family goal, and for doing everything in your power to make this degree a reality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Access to higher education continues to be inequitable in the United States. Students from low-income and minority groups are consistently underrepresented in higher education and often have less access to critical resources that can help them achieve postsecondary degrees (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Day & Newburger, 2002; Myers, Brown, & Pavel, 2010; Parrish, 2004). Many college access programs exist to address this gap in access (Perna, 2002). This study sought to add to the body of knowledge about college access programs by looking at how students from low-income backgrounds participating in a college access program experience the C5 Georgia college access program.

Obtaining a college education provides people with great opportunities in the United States. Research (e.g., Parrish, 2004) has shown that people who earn a college degree have the potential to earn double the lifetime earnings of people who do not have a college degree. Postsecondary education also provides a plethora of other benefits to individuals such as health insurance and pension funds (Baum et al., 2010) or improved working conditions and leisure activities (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). In addition, researchers such as Parrish (2004), have demonstrated that society as a whole benefits from its citizens obtaining a college education.

The scholarly community has presented overwhelming evidence that low-SES students are “less likely to aspire to, apply to, be prepared for, or enroll in postsecondary education than higher-SES students” (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007, p.#). Students from low-income

backgrounds are less often academically qualified for college (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008); have less familial resources and college information (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010); and have limited access to college planning, school counseling resources, mentoring, and effective teachers (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Myers et al., 2010; Tierney et al., 2005).

In order to address disparities in access to college for students from low-income backgrounds, the federal government began the college access movement with its TRIO programs (Balz & Esten, 2011). Those initial programs are now joined by a plethora of intervention efforts funded by governments, nonprofit organizations, individuals, and educational institutions (Perna, 2002). These programs address existing disparities in college access in a variety of ways.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars still know very little about how college access programs are functioning to create access to college for students from low-income backgrounds (Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002), even though the literature on college access programs indicates that scholars generally accept that these programs are working (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Swail & Perna, 2002). Scholars have recommendations for what programs should contain based on research on college enrollment, and they also have theorized that these types of programs should work. However, whether or not the programs are accomplishing their goals is a question with limited exploration (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Myers et al., 2010; Swail & Perna, 2002). In particular, no research exists linking various programmatic components to students' increased enrollment in college. One study indicated that some of the most prominent college access programs receiving funding from the federal government were least likely to contain the "ideal" program factors identified from

previous literature (Perna, 2002). There exists a gap in scholarly understanding about if and how college access programs are increasing access to higher education for underrepresented populations such as students from low-income backgrounds.

College access programs can play a crucial role in increasing college enrollment for underrepresented groups and ensuring equitable educational access for all groups in the United States. Several scholars have posed the question, “with a finite amount of time and resources, which activities are most likely to improve educational achievement for underrepresented youth in the United States?” (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p. 2). Several scholars have suggested research agendas that could add to the body of knowledge in this area. Researchers could explore improving existing practices in college access programs in order to lay groundwork for eliminating programs that are not producing desired results (King, 2009) or expand paradigms to think critically about the perspective of families from low-income backgrounds who may be accessing these interventions (Smith, 2008). Perna (2002) suggested that scholars conduct further research in order to comprehend the overall effectiveness of college access programs. Perna also suggested conducting research to better understand which particular components of college access programs actually succeed in promoting college enrollment and which program goals and services work with particular groups. It is critical that scholars and advocates in this field understand how program interventions are functioning to promote college access in order to create policies and interventions that maximize the use of time, resources, and funding.

A thorough review of the literature surrounding college access interventions indicated that not enough scholarly research has been conducted to determine how college access interventions are creating access for students from low-income backgrounds. Many college access programs exist throughout the country (King, 2009; Tierney et al., 2005) – one

comprehensive survey received results from 1,100 college access programs (Perna, 2002). These programs serve over a million students every year (Engle & Tinto, 2008) (and likely many more), yet scholars know little about the functioning of the specific programmatic components and implementation (Perna, 2002). The literature highlighted some factors that work to promote college enrollment, such as academic preparation and parent involvement (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001), but there is a profound lack of knowledge of how factors like these affect students in college access programs. Scholars have little information on students' experiences within college access programs, and therefore little understanding about how these programs are functioning to promote access to college for members of underrepresented groups.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore a case of a college access program for students from low-income backgrounds to see how it promotes college access. This exploratory case study cast a wide net into the journey of discovering what experiences participants in this program were having. By taking a qualitative approach, this study allowed students' voices to be heard and not oppressed by dominant paradigms. This case study also was guided by, but not confined by, existing research on college access programs. This study obtained valuable data about the functioning of a college access program for students from low-income backgrounds, and added to the body of scholarly knowledge on the effects of college access programs on the students participating in them.

Primary Research Question

The focus of this study was directed by one primary research question: How do program stakeholders perceive that C5 Georgia functions to promote college access for students from low-income backgrounds?

Significance of the Study

The field of college access has enormous implications for equity of income and quality of life in the United States (Baum et al., 2010); this area of research has the potential to provide significant implications for underrepresented students in the application of policy, practice, and funding for college access. Bragg, et al. (2006) suggested that many programs are receiving significant government funding and funding from private sources without substantial research to recommend the programs and strategies being implemented for particular groups of students. According to Perna (2002), understanding program components can and should influence the allocation of resources in often limited budgets of college access programs, can influence policy and budgetary decisions at the federal governmental level, and can affect gaps that continue to exist between demographic and socioeconomic groups in postsecondary attainment. For example, in one study, three-fourths of college access programs were found to focus on students from low-income backgrounds, yet only one-fourth of them had five critical components that scholars hypothesized would increase college enrollment for that group (Perna, 2002).

Other scholars asserted that a lack of evaluation and understanding of these programs limits their ability to more effectively serve students and to have a greater impact on educational inequities. That is, without a better understanding of college access programs and how students are experiencing them, advocates are crippled in their efforts to most effectively impact students. As King (2009) stated, “this is part of a larger inquiry – who is gaining access to college, and how” (p. 2), an inquiry that is imperative to the well-being of U.S. citizens and the future of our country. With the qualitative data produced from this study scholars may gain a deeper understanding of how these programs are functioning to help students access higher education.

Conceptual Framework

A critical perspective mandated that the researcher join with and listen to the experiences of the students in order to understand how to transform societal inequities (Brown, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Therefore, this study collaborated with students and stakeholders as experts to hear their experiences in order to understand current intervention efforts for students from low-income backgrounds in this program.

In addition, this study used social and cultural capital theories as another base for analyzing findings that came from the data. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), familiarity with favored values, norms and practices promotes success for individuals in society. Those who have understanding of those favored practices or critical networks to connect to privileges have *capital*. Capital can come in several forms such as *social capital*, which indicates relationships or group membership, or *cultural capital*, which indicates knowledge of tasks or skills.

Acquiring capital is a process that happens through socialization in homes, schools, and other organizations in societies, when individuals come to understand certain cultural assumptions, norms, or practices (Bourdieu, 1986). Bernhardt (2013) noted that means that students from low-income backgrounds are at a distinct disadvantage in acquiring this capital because they are often underserved in homes and schools. He went on to note that “cultural capital is influenced by dominant cultural values, norms, and beliefs; cultural capital provides various social, political, economic, and academic advantages to certain members of society; and cultural capital is unequally distributed to members of society” (p. 210). In sum, this study examined how cultural and social capital in the form of norms, networks, beliefs, skills or tasks may have been accessed by participants in the college access program.

Summary of Methodology

This study was designed as a case study to understand the perceptions of program stakeholders in a college access program on how the program functions to promote access to college for students from low-income backgrounds. The purpose of a case study is to “investigate a current phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context” (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, 2014, p. 16). The researcher chose a case study in order to take a stance of exploration, to prioritize student and stakeholder experiences, and to give voice to them

Using a semi-structured interview format, the researcher interviewed seven student participants and seven adult stakeholders who were affiliated with the program. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher synthesized and analyzed the data using qualitative research procedures. The researcher then produced a set of categories and themes found in the interviews. These categories and themes are presented in Chapter 4 with a thick, rich description from each participant, and also are discussed in Chapter 5 in terms of their relationship to current literature, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research.

Limitations

There were several limitations of the current study. They include the following: First, the researcher chose to interview students from a variety of grade levels. Thus, not all students interviewed had experienced every component of the program. Second, four of the seven students interviewed were ambassadors for the program, so they may have not been a representative sample. Next, only one parent participant interview was conducted. Finally, the researcher remained aware that researcher bias could be a limitation. However, she actively worked to mitigate that possibility.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, the researcher used operationalized definitions of the following terms:

Students from low-income backgrounds –In this study, students from low-income backgrounds were defined as having a household income of less than \$10,000 per person, in keeping with the criteria for selection to the C5 Georgia program (C5-Georgia, 2013).

College access programs – any program or intervention falling under the umbrella of promoting goals of college enrollment for populations that are underrepresented in higher education through use of programmatic means outside of a school curriculum. Some activities may occur during the school day or on a school campus, but programs are organized and funded independently from school entities (King, 2009; Myers et al., 2010).

C5 Georgia - a college access program targeting students from low-income backgrounds in a major urban area in the southeastern United States. The program runs from eighth grade until twelfth grade and has activities each year for students. The primary summer activities in each year are as follows: first and second year – summer camp; third year – outdoors trip in Wyoming; fourth year – out of state college tour; fifth year – capstone summit project. Events throughout the year include programming such as college tours and information sessions, leadership trainings, service projects, and parent trainings. Each year around fifty students are selected to join the cohort that begins in eighth grade.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to frame the study, the researcher first did a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding college access programs. This chapter reviews the value of postsecondary education and the disparities in obtaining it, the research examining reasons behind disparities in postsecondary education, and the role of college access programs in addressing those disparities.

The Value of Postsecondary Education

In the United States, postsecondary education has become a gateway to a better quality of life for its citizens. Students who go on to complete a bachelor's degree, on average, earn double the total lifetime income of those students who only obtain a high school education, and a third more total lifetime income than those students who do not complete college but attend some level of post-secondary education (Day & Newburger, 2002; Parrish, 2004). A study published by the College Board found that the average person in the United States employed full-time with a bachelor's degree earned \$50,900 – a figure that is 62% higher than the salary of an employee with a high school diploma (Baum et al., 2010). Earning a college degree is sometimes the only way that low-income individuals might overcome their economic situation (Engle & Tinto, 2008); it is clear that a bachelor's degree can dictate the lifetime earning potential of an individual in this country.

Individuals in American society do not benefit only from the monetary opportunities provided by obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher; several studies have illuminated the

nonmonetary benefits of a college education to individuals. The College Board's report on the value of higher education found that individuals who graduate from college have a better chance of earning benefits such as health insurance and pension funds subsidized or provided by employers (Baum et al., 2010). Other benefits outlined by researchers included opportunities such as increased savings, improved working conditions, better consumer decision making, more hobbies and leisure activities, and fringe benefits such as a company car or child care provided by employers (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). Scholars have also claimed that "college attendance decreases prejudice, enhances worldview, increases economic and job security and generally encourages individuals to be more open-minded, more cultured, more rational, more consistent, and less authoritarian" (Rowley and Hurtado, 2002, as cited in Mudge & Higgins, 2011, pp. 24-25). Improved health conditions and greater opportunities for the children of the next generation accompany the acquisition of a bachelor's degree, as does improved life satisfaction (Baum et al., 2010), and graduates from college are more able to build assets such as retirement account, bank accounts, and home ownership (Parrish, 2004).

The society in which individuals live, work and play also reaps the benefits of higher education. Parrish (2004) quoted that 15%-20% of the annual economic growth in the United States to increases in education levels, and Mudge and Higgins (2011) also cited economic growth as a benefit of higher levels of individual education. Several studies found that higher levels of education correspond to intangible benefits to society such as increased understanding of current events and greater civic participation – including volunteer work, charitable giving, and voting – as well as factors that increase the cohesion of society such as less intolerance and prejudice, lower inequality, reduced crime rates, and a reduction in the spread of contagious diseases (Baum et al., 2010; Foster, 2002; Mudge & Higgins, 2011; Parrish, 2004). In addition,

higher levels of education correspond to lower unemployment rates; thus, increased individual levels of post-secondary education decrease individuals' dependence on the government for financial support and social welfare programs (Baum et al., 2010; Mudge & Higgins, 2011). In addition to reducing the strain on public budgets and adding tax revenue to society, postsecondary education is necessary to keep the United States competitive in the emerging global economy in terms of knowledge and training (Engle & Tinto, 2008). According to Engle and Tinto's 2008 report, fifty percent of the fastest-growing occupations (and thus, where future jobs likely lie) in the United States require employees to obtain a bachelor's degree to be eligible for those occupations.

Disparities in Obtaining Postsecondary Education

Enormous disparities exist in the United States in who accesses a college education. In spite of evidence that a college education is the "necessary passport to the middle class" (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002, p. 3), students with the least success in attending college are those students who are from non-Asian racial groups and whose parents have low income or low education status (Myers et al., 2010). Parrish (2004) cited that family income level, when combined with parental educational attainment, is the best predictor of college enrollment. Many other scholars have also demonstrated that the opportunity gap exists in the United States in a distinct way; in recent decades, more students have attended college yet fewer students from low-income, minority, or first generation college backgrounds are enrolling (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007; Baum et al., 2010; Day & Newburger, 2002; Harvill et al., 2012; Parrish, 2004; Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011; U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Some statistics placed the rate of low-income student enrollment in college as half the rate of their high-income peers (2001), and others demonstrated

that the “highest achieving students from low-income schools are enrolling in higher education at the same rates as the lowest achieving students in high income schools” (Haycock, 2006, as cited in Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009, p. 1).

From the U.S. Department of Education Statistics (2007) report, scholars have learned that 81% of students graduating high school from the top income quintile went to college while only 54% of students from the bottom quintile went to college. 50.3% of the students from low-income backgrounds earned a bachelor’s degree in six years, compared to a staggering 73.8% of the top income students. Baum, et al. (2010) found that nearly all students from the highest income quintile and parent education groups enrolled in postsecondary education, while at least 25% of those from other groups were not enrolling. Parrish (2004) cited that students from low-income backgrounds who are qualified to attend college are prevented 48% of the time from college attendance because of financial restrictions or barriers and finds a 30% gap between higher- and lower-income students who graduate from high school and go on to enroll in college immediately after graduating. Economically disadvantaged students not only are less likely to attend college, but are also less likely to attend selective colleges when they attend than their higher-income peers; often the less selective institutions have lower graduate rates than their more selective peers (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007).

The scholarly community has presented overwhelming evidence that low-SES students are “less likely to aspire to, apply to, be prepared for, or enroll in postsecondary education than higher-SES students” (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). Though the purpose of this paper is to explore how a college access program works, a brief review of the literature attempting to understand the reasons behind these disparities seems appropriate.

Research Exploring the Reasons Behind Disparities in Postsecondary Education

Several scholars have identified differences in low- and high-income student's college-going support, preparation and behavior that may influence the disparities in attendance of college. One of the differences has to do with academic preparation. Having adequate academic preparation is necessary for students to become qualified for, attend, and complete college (Bragg et al., 2006), yet often students from low-income backgrounds attend schools with fewer resources and even lack rigorous academic course choices. One study demonstrated that students from low-income groups underperform in math and reading compared to higher-income peers (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008), thus disadvantaging them in become college qualified. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2001), becoming college qualified is a critical task in attaining a college education. Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to begin planning for college early, though studies found that planning for college that begins in the eighth grade can have a significant impact on students' obtaining the necessary qualifications by twelfth grade (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

In addition, parental encouragement can have an enormous effect on student enrollment in college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Students from low-income backgrounds often face the hurdle of less engagement from their parents in their academic activities (Bergin, Cooks, & Bergin, 2007), though from a critical perspective, this lack of involvement may not represent a lack of interest (Smith, 2008). Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds more often speak to their children about college and more frequently are able to create financial plans that will pay for college in the future; they also have more knowledge regarding programs awarding financial aid to students. One study asserted that having involved and knowledgeable parents can increase the likelihood of being qualified for college by up to 18% (Cabrera & La Nasa,

2001). Parents from low-income backgrounds also overestimate college costs and have inaccurate information about the cost of college attendance (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

Researchers have identified additional factors outside the home that might limit college access for students from low-income backgrounds, including but not limited to: access to college planning and school counseling resources, involvement in mentoring, and level of high school teacher effectiveness (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Myers et al., 2010; Tierney et al., 2005).

Other research focused on individual student characteristics as barriers or supports to obtaining a college education. One study showed that motivation to achieve can be an enormous factor in student aspiration to and attendance in college (Pizzolato et al., 2011). The same study discussed that greater perceptions of control might lead to students' belief in their ability to be successful in school, and that personal goal setting (particularly career goals) can help develop aspiration through meaning and purpose when looking toward future academic achievement. Educational aspirations have been documented as a predictor of educational attainment, and low-income status predicts lower educational aspirations for students (Bergin et al., 2007). Compared to 94 percent of highest-income quartile youths who expect to attend college, only 78 percent in the lowest income quartile expect to attend college. In spite of the many external barriers that exist in their schools and families, these aspirations can be a key factor in students' accessing college education (Bergin et al., 2007).

All of the scholarly work thus far indicated that there are several reasons that students from low-income backgrounds might not attend college at the same rates as their higher-income peers. However, more important is how society might address the discrepancies that exist. Given that higher education benefits individuals and society in drastic ways, that gaps in educational

attainment can affect not only the current but also future generations, and that post-secondary education can be a first step in remedying many inequalities (Baum et al., 2010; Parrish, 2004), the social justice implications of issues surrounding college access are clear; this paper will now shift to focus on what can be done about the existing disparities in college access for students from low-income backgrounds.

College Access Programs: Addressing Disparities in Postsecondary Education

In the United States, college access efforts began with the implementation of the TRIO programs by the federal government in 1965 to “ensure educational opportunity for all Americans, regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstances” (Balz & Esten, 2011). Now, the GEAR UP programs join the TRIO programs as federally-based interventions, but hundreds or perhaps thousands of other organizations currently exist, founded by institutions of higher education, corporations, and nonprofit organizations. Programs working toward advocacy in the United States often operate independently of one another but are often equally passionate about promoting access to college for underserved populations.

In order to address existing disparities in access to higher education, advocates work through many different modalities. These include but are not limited to efforts in school reform, efforts in college recruitment, and efforts in parent education. However, the landscape of college access efforts is dominated by community intervention programs outside of school that seek to increase students’ access to college (Myers et al., 2010). King (2009) referred to these individual programs as college access programs. Bragg, et al (2006) called them bridge, transition, or outreach programs. Other scholars have referred to these intervention programs as college preparation programs (Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003) and precollege outreach programs (Perna, 2002), or precollegiate academic development programs or precollegiate outreach

programs (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Though the scholarly literature examines these programs by many names, the programs have in common an attempt to provide missing elements that will increase students' likelihood to aspire to, prepare for, and obtain college enrollment (Gullatt & Jan, 2003) and decrease inequitable access to higher education (King, 2009). For the purposes of the remainder of this paper, these programs will be referred to generically as college access programs, given that this umbrella nomenclature fits the common qualities and mission of all programs of this type.

College access programs are student-centered programs that may be operated and by federal or state agencies, colleges and universities or non-profit organizations (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; King, 2009; Perna, 2002). "While these services may take place within a school setting or during the school day, their function is not to impact a school's existing curriculum or teaching practices, but rather to supplement and extend a student's weekday curricular and curricular experiences" (Gullatt & Jan, 2003, p. 4). Students may receive direct services of information regarding college, inspirational programming such as mentoring or advocacy, academic supplementation or support (such as tutoring or test preparation), college visit opportunities, and college and career counseling (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; King, 2009). These interventions focus not only on external factors to the student such as academic preparation, but also on intrinsic factors such as aspiration to higher education (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). All college access programs target specific groups that have difficulty accessing postsecondary education, such as low-income or minority populations (Bragg et al., 2006), and King (2009) notes that these programs "differentially define, target and justify choices of potential participants" (p. 4), although most participants fit into the category of students who are underrepresented in higher education. One estimate placed the number of states with college access programs as high as forty-five (Bragg et

al., 2006), and Perna's 2002 study of college access programs yielded viable responses from 1,100 college access programs currently operating.

Some of the most widely recognized college access programs are the federally-funded programs TRIO and GEAR UP. These programs are called for and funded by federal legislation and implemented throughout the country (King, 2009), and much of the existing knowledge about college access programs is based on examinations of these high-profile federal programs (with less attention paid to smaller initiatives) (Perna, 2002). The federal TRIO programs are programs that target low-income, first generation and disabled students, and these are the oldest direct services of their kind. According to Engle and Tinto (2008), 2,800 TRIO programs serve approximately one million students across the nation each year. The Talent Search and Upward Bound programs are the arms of the TRIO programs that seek to increase college access and enrollment by targeting middle and high school students and providing a range of services that include counseling, tutoring, mentoring and workshops regarding college. Through Upward Bound, students receive additional academic support and weekend and after school enrichment activities (Engle & Tinto, 2008). According to Perna (2002), "the federal government significantly expanded its role in 1998 with the establishment of GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation" (p. 65). GEAR UP targets the college preparation and enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds and provides discretionary grants to states and partners working with high-poverty middle schools and high schools; its funds are available to various partnerships as well as state governments (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Some of the nongovernmental college access programs that have gained prominence in the United States include the I Have a Dream (IHAD) Program (established 1981); this program

originated in New York City and now serves more than 13,000 students across 60 cities in the nation. MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), MSEN (Math Science Education Network), and Puente Programs are other examples of privately operated programs that continue to promote college access and enrollment for underrepresented students (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Perna (2002) reported on the National Survey of Outreach Programs, a survey and implemented by the College Board, the Education Resources Institute and the Council for Opportunity in Education. This survey yielded results from 1,110 programs across the nation, including all fifty states, and found that one-fifth of these programs are funded through private organizations, business, and individuals, with the rest accounted for by federally-funded programs. In addition, organizations such as the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) and the National College Access Network (NCAN) provide networking and professional development opportunities for programs both publicly and privately funded. NCAN currently boasts over 350 members in its database (www.collegeaccess.org).

Understanding How College Access Programs Are Promoting Access

Several scholars have attempted to identify qualities in these programs that create effective college access interventions. In a foundation study upon which a great deal of subsequent research relies, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) identified three critical tasks that students must accomplish in order to go to college. These tasks include acquiring college qualifications, graduating from high school, and applying to a college. As a part of these three critical tasks, students also have to develop a predisposition to attend college, find college information, and make choices about where to attend college. While this work identifies some of the factors that can affect these tasks (early college planning, parent involvement, and at-risk factors), the authors acknowledged that very little is known about the factors that compel students

to complete and submit a college application. This study also identified key hurdles that students may face in the accomplishment of the critical tasks, including completion of application and financial aid forms, concerns and uncertainties over the cost involved in college education or in selection of a major, and the intimidation involved in the complex process of college applications. If students actually apply to college, they then gain further information that can help them, but some students do not complete the three critical tasks necessary to accomplish the application (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

Other scholars looked at the college access landscape as one involving social or cultural capital. Taking a critical view of college access, one author encouraged advocates to take the perspective that parents from low-income backgrounds want to access higher education for their children, but lack the social capital to do so; thus, programs should provide that social capital or “college knowledge” (Smith, 2008). Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2008) also discussed problems of college access from a framework of social capital, encouraging the development of social capital through access interventions as a primary form of helping. As compared to their low-income peers, higher-income students often employ the use of strategies in the college application process in order to create more college options and often have access to more resources such as test preparation, college visits, and private consultants that students from low-income backgrounds simply cannot afford (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). One scholar found that college choices often depended on class-based notions of acceptable college attendance – parents’ as well as school expectations (McDonough, 1997). Other studies have demonstrated that social capital in the form of counseling can shape college aspirations and provide informational resources that increase college enrollment (Pham & Keenan, 2011).

Several other scholars have explored college access from the angle of social and cultural capital and the role of those factors in increasing college enrollment behaviors (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002).

Other literature focused overtly on factors such as academic preparation that are known to increase college enrollment. According to one such article (Perna, 2005), college access programs can be most effective by ensuring academic preparation for those students who are under-enrolling in higher education. In addition to colleges requiring certain academic standards for admission that students must strive to meet, low-income and other underrepresented groups of students are the least likely to receive the academic preparation needed to access college admission. Academic preparation is the most empirically-supported intervention in college access interventions, and access to rigorous coursework and college qualifying academic preparation increases students' chances of enrolling in college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). For example, having taken at least one advanced-level math class correlates to a greater likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education (Perna, 2005).

In one study, researchers found that students in college access programs took classes that led to admission to college, particularly in chemistry, advanced placement and honors courses. This study presented clear evidence that enrolling and succeeding in the appropriate college-preparation courses is the single most important factor in increasing postsecondary enrollment after all factors were considered (Hagedorn & Fogel, 2002). While academic qualification and rigorous coursework are one of Cabrera and La Nasa's (2001) three critical tasks for enrolling in college, still only 29% of lowest-income students gained at least a minimum academic qualification for college, while a striking 70% from the highest income levels were qualified, making students from low-income backgrounds 15% less likely to be academically qualified for

college than high-income students (after controlling for other factors) (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001); this study also noted the importance of early college planning in order to accomplish academic qualification – as early as eighth grade. Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to take advanced math in eighth grade, and are disadvantaged at every step of the academic path from that point (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). Perna (2005) noted that “the groups of students that continue to be less likely to enroll in and graduate from college are also the groups that are less likely to be adequately academically prepared: namely, individuals with low family incomes, et al” (127-128).

While academic preparation is necessary for college enrollment, it is not the only factor that can influence the college enrollment process. Some researchers have focused on family and parental involvement factors that increase college enrollment. For example, one study found that parents’ educational expectations can have a greater effect on the college aspirations of youth than their education level or occupation (Berzin, 2010). Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) also found that having high expectations from parents had a significant effect on college enrollment behaviors. A review of the research in 2010 indicated that “parental support is one of the most important indicators of students’ educational aspirations” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010, p. 117). In particular parents from low-income backgrounds are likely to face obstacles to obtaining appropriate college and financial aid information and to see postsecondary education as unattainable; without family member support and approval, students are unlikely to realize aspiration for postsecondary pursuits (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). Parents from low-income backgrounds are more likely to see a high-school or two-year degree as the norm and not to see a four-year degree as attainable or normal for their children (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). The ASHE Higher Education Report (2007) concluded that students from low-income

backgrounds would benefit not only from increased academic preparation, but also from increased involvement from parents and a supportive home environment focused on college enrollment. Another study found that family factors can affect the pursuit of higher education, and also discovered that counseling can play an important role in assisting families to support higher education for their children (Pham & Keenan, 2011).

Myers, et al. (2010) summarized a set of factors that are generally accepted in the scholarly community as influencing the pipeline to college. These factors included: student's academic achievement and preparation, college planning, mentoring, tutoring, first generation student status, family and cultural attitudes, parental involvement, career aspirations and expectations, finances, socioeconomic status, race and high school and teacher effectiveness. Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar (2003) outlined nine factors from the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) that relate to programmatic components of college access interventions, based on previous qualitative research: a rigorous curriculum, academic, college and career counseling, co-curricular activities, incorporation of students' cultures, family and community engagement, peer support, mentoring, timing of intervention, and funding priorities (Tierney et al., 2003). They further explored some of these factors in a 2005 publication (Tierney et al., 2005), unpacking the literature surrounding various aspects of these factors. Their research also noted some structural components to programs that seem linked to success such as: yearlong activities, having knowledgeable and available counselors, and access to a college preparation curriculum. These structures helped students develop five college-going skills: academic preparation, college planning, college aspirations, socialization and acculturation, and financial aid and planning. Most scholars agreed that comprehensive programs incorporating many of the factors cited above are most effective (Cabrera & La Nasa,

2001). Comprehensive programs focus on a variety of factors known to increase college enrollment (such as academic preparation and family involvement), and look at the entire precollege process, and not just the process of applying to college (Myers et al., 2010; Perna, 2002). In general, the literature indicates that implementing factors that increase college enrollment such as increased academic preparation, providing information on aid, and involving parents should be the focus of college access programs (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007).

Thinking Critically About College Access Programs

According to Perna (2002), while there are many frameworks that look at the college choice process and college-going behavior, still scholars know very little about the functioning of the elements that have been identified in college access programs. Though it may be generally accepted that comprehensive interventions are the most effective, and that certain factors have been shown to increase college enrollment, the specific relationship between programmatic elements of college access programs and increased student enrollment has not been satisfactorily investigated. Extremely limited research has focused on identifying which aspects of college access programs promote college enrollment for low-income and other underrepresented groups of students; program administrators and researchers are thus very limited in their understanding of what truly promotes college access (Perna, 2002). Though we have recommendations of what these programs should contain, “whether the programs work is another question entirely – one that has little empirical evidence” (Myers et al., 2010, p. 301). In fact, the scholarly community agrees that very little evidence exists to support the majority of college access interventions, though most scholars are in agreement that these programs should work in theory (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Swail & Perna, 2002). King’s 2009 study found only 14 peer-reviewed studies that focused on college access interventions over a ten-year period in the

United States, in spite of “countless College Access Programs across the country” (p. 10). Another study found several published reports that inventory and describe college access programs, but no review that provided a systematic meta-analysis of evidence of how they function to promote access (Harvill et al., 2012). Bragg, et al. (2006) suggested that many programs are receiving significant government funding and funding from private sources without substantial research to recommend the programs and strategies being implemented for particular groups of students.

Perna (2005) discussed the importance of understanding which program components are functioning to promote college access in these interventions. According to Perna, understanding program components can and should influence the allocation of resources in often-limited budgets of college access programs, can influence policy and budgetary decisions at the federal governmental level, and can affect gaps that continue to exist between demographic and socioeconomic groups in postsecondary attainment. For example, in the broad survey conducted by the College Board and discussed in Perna’s 2002 article, researchers found that the majority of existing programs do not focus enough attention on improving the academic preparations of participants. Three-fourths of these programs were found to focus on students from low-income backgrounds, yet only one-fourth of them have five critical components that scholars such as Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) have speculated will increase college enrollment. According to Perna (2002), “only 6% of all programs can be characterized as “ideal” programs containing 11 of the most important components suggested by the literature” (pp. 78-79). Parrish (2004) believes that TRIO and GEAR UP programs should be expanded in order to increase access, but Perna (2002) found TRIO programs to be some of the least likely to contain critical elements known to promote college enrollment. Thus, even though some scholarly literature exists to

support speculation on what types of interventions are functioning to promote access, the few studies conducted of college access programs indicate that some of the best-known college access interventions do not necessarily adhere to what little is speculated to be working.

Scholars have made recommendations for the future of college access programs and the research surrounding how they work. Bragg, et al. (2006) pointed out that many of these initiatives are not implemented fully or are underutilized and require stringent program evaluation and data to evaluate them. King (2009) suggested that more research is needed exploring improving existing practices in college access programs in order to lay a groundwork for eliminating programs that are not producing desired results for increased access. Smith (2008) and King (2009) both suggested that college access programs should expand their paradigms to think critically about the perspective of families from low-income backgrounds who may be accessing these interventions, as it is possible that the current interventions are a part of the ongoing oppressive framework for these families. Additionally, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) asserted that more attention should be paid to what triggers the actual application process, and not just focus on studies pertaining to college enrollment behaviors, as students must apply to college before they can attend. Finally, Perna (2002) suggested that scholars conduct further research in order to comprehend the overall effectiveness of college access programs, in addition to conducting research to better understand which particular components of college access programs actually succeed in promoting college enrollment and which program goals and services work with particular groups. While Perna identified critical elements from the literature in her study, she advised that even these critical elements also need to be examined in terms of which of these components may actually be functioning to promote college access. Gullatt and Jan (2003) highlighted the need for rigorous, internal program evaluation conducted on college

access programs, and not conducted by stakeholders who have connections to the programs.

They noted that current program evaluation data provides little useful information regarding the impact of college access programs.

Because college access programs can play such a critical role in increasing college enrollment for underrepresented groups and ensuring equitable educational access for all groups in the United States, it is important that advocates in this field understand what interventions are functioning to promote college access in order to create policy and programmatic interventions that use time, resources, and funding wisely. While Gullatt and Jan (2003) highlighted the National Survey of Outreach Programs and its conclusion that college access programs can in fact help low-income and other underrepresented students, they asserted that lacking evaluation and understanding of these how these programs function limits their ability to more effectively serve students and to have a greater impact on education policy and educational inequities. Thus, without a better understanding of college access programs and how they are achieving access, advocates are crippled in their efforts to most effectively impact students. As King (2009) stated, “this is part of a larger inquiry – who is gaining access to college, and how” (p. 2), an inquiry that is imperative to the well-being of our citizens and the future of our country. According to Bragg, et al. (2006) “these developments need to be explored if the United States is to do a better job of encouraging and supporting more of its youth to participate and succeed in college” (p. 17).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study sought to understand how one college access program promoted access to college for students from low-income backgrounds. Previous to this study, very little research explored how these widely implemented programs function to create college access (Swail & Perna, 2002). Therefore, by examining one case of a college access program serving students from low-income backgrounds, this study sought to address inequities in college access by adding to the body of knowledge about how to help students from low-income backgrounds get to college. A theoretical lens of cultural capital allowed the researcher to investigate how the program functioned to connect students to social and cultural capital that might help them get to college. The case study methodology allowed the researcher to analyze one case of a college access program in depth, with the goal of understanding how this program addresses the inequalities that exist in college access.

Research Question

A thorough review of the literature surrounding college access interventions indicated that a paucity of scholarly research exists examining how college access interventions are promoting access to college. Though thousands of these types of programs exist throughout the country, serving countless numbers of students each year, very little research exists analyzing their programmatic components and implementation (Perna, 2002). The literature highlighted some factors that work to promote college enrollment (e.g., academic preparation and parent involvement) (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). However, there is a profound lack of knowledge

regarding how factors like these are operating within access programs (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Swail & Perna, 2002). Many scholars recommended that further studies be conducted to understand how these programs may be promoting access (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; King, 2009; Swail & Perna, 2002), because policy decisions and allocations of funds and resources could be critical in creating more opportunity to equalize college access for underrepresented groups. Thus, the aim of this study was to answer the following question: How do program stakeholders perceive that C5 Georgia functions to promote college access for students from low-income backgrounds?

Program Description

This study took place at the college access program C5 Georgia (C5), a college access program targeting students from low-income backgrounds in a major urban area in the Southeastern United States. C5 derives its name from the core principles that shape the program: Character-driven, community-focused, challenge-ready, college-bound, and committed to a better future. The program runs from eighth grade until twelfth grade and has activities each year for students such as college tours and information sessions, leadership trainings, service projects, and other events. Each year approximately fifty students are selected to join the cohort that begins in eighth grade.

This particular program was selected because it attempts to specifically address the issue of inequitable access to college for students from low-income backgrounds using a comprehensive, character-based program. In addition, this program includes several identified key factors thought to be effective in college access (Perna, 2002), focuses on students from low-income backgrounds, and enjoys robust engagement by participants. According to the program website, 95% of program participants continue with the program each year, 98% of program

participants have gone on to college, and 100% of program participants have been accepted into a college or the military. In the history of the program, past participants have been awarded \$2.25 million in scholarships. While no academic research has focused on C5 Georgia to date, this program offered a rich opportunity to study a college access program that, in theory, helps students from low-income backgrounds increase their access to college.

In order to fully understand the context of the study, a brief description of the C5 Georgia program is necessary. The program is a non-profit organization with a mission “to change the odds for high-potential teens from risk-filled environments, inspiring them to pursue personal success, and preparing them for leadership roles in college, work and their communities” (C5-Georgia, 2013). The program goals include the following:

To help teens develop a vision for their future—one in which they see themselves capable of becoming whatever they choose. To give students the skills to be successful while navigating some of the most tumultuous years of their lives, from high school through college and into the workforce for the first time. To offer underserved teens the vital experiences needed to both positively shape their vision and practice essential life skills. To give teens from challenging environments varied and numerous opportunities to be successful in life and in their communities (C5-Georgia, 2013).

C5 Georgia includes program, events focused on goals that vary during each year of school (8th-12th). Students are selected in the spring of their 7th grade year; and in order to qualify for the program, students must meet the requirements of having high leadership capability and having a family income of less than \$10,000 per family member or having other major risk factors.

Students are nominated by an affiliate counselor or advocate by the time they reach 7th grade and

then undergo a selection process involving essays and interviews. The program each year focuses on a variety of themes including: leadership, future opportunities for college and career, and serving the community.

The C5 Georgia program requires that students maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA to stay in the program. It also requires mandatory attendance at four events per year, a minimum community service hour requirement of 250 hours, and mandatory attendance at summer activities. For the first three summers, students participate in a camp experience, with the third summer being an out-of-state hiking and camping experience. The fourth summer experience is a college trip to out-of-state colleges, and the final summer experience is a capstone summit project that focuses on advocacy in the community. Programming during the year includes events such as financial aid information, college application work, community service events, speakers, networking, workshops on leadership topics, and other topics. Each year of the program has a particular focus. The themes for each year are: Learning to Lead Yourself, Learning to Lead Others, Expanding Your Horizons, Exploring Your Future, and Engaging Your Community.

Procedure

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained IRB consent prior to conducting the study through The University of Georgia Institutional Review Board. All materials pertaining to the study were reviewed and designated as ethically sound by the IRB. Other potential ethical considerations that the researcher addressed in this study included two areas. First, the researcher took care not to interfere with the actual C5 Georgia program and was mindful and respectful of the parameters given her within to conduct this research. Though some interviews were conducted during

program meeting times, prior consent from the Executive Director was obtained, as well as an understanding of the times that would be appropriate to meet with students and parents so as to not keep them away from valuable program activities.

Second, many of the students involved in the C5 Georgia organization were minors. Thus, consent was obtained from a legal guardian to work with these students. Consent was obtained from both students and from legal guardians for students to participate in one sixty-minute interview with the researcher regarding their experiences with the C5 Georgia program. The researcher fully informed both parents and students of the purpose of the study and the process of the study so that they might be as knowledgeable as possible throughout the process. Adult stakeholders also signed a consent form prior to beginning the interview using the same informed consent process.

In order to recruit participants for the study, the researcher sent an email script of introduction to the Executive Director of the program, who subsequently forwarded it to students and parents in the program. The researcher also attended multiple C5 Georgia program events to recruit participants. She additionally contacted a group of students, parents, and stakeholders on an individual basis with the same email script. These individual referrals came from the Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. As an incentive for any participant, the researcher offered a \$10.00 iTunes gift card to anyone who participated in an interview. Participants received the iTunes gift card immediately upon completion of the interview.

Participants

For the purposive sample, students were members of C5 Georgia in good standing with the program while adult stakeholders represented a variety of roles within the program. Because of the selection criteria for admission to the program, all students were from low-income

backgrounds. In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the case, the researcher conducted interviews with seven students currently in the program as well as seven adult stakeholders.

Adult stakeholder participants included program employees, parents, and affiliated counselors.

Subsequently, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven students and seven adult stakeholders from the C5 Georgia program in January and February of 2014. After a sufficient number of participants had been recruited to make a case, they included seven students in grades 8-12, an alumni member of the program, a camp counselor, an affiliated parent, an affiliated school counselor, and three program employees. Participants came from a variety of racial backgrounds, including Asian, Hispanic, White, and African American. The interviewee demographics and affiliation with program are included in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2:

Table 3.1

Adult Stakeholder Interviewee Demographics

<i>Adult Stakeholder Pseudonym</i>	<i>Role in the Program</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>
Brooklyn	Former College Readiness Program Director, Affiliated nominating counselor	African American	M.A.	Social Worker	Married
Garrett	Executive Director	Caucasian	B.A.	Executive Director of Program	Married
Heather	Current College Readiness Program Director	African American	M.A.	College Readiness Program Director	Divorced
Jennifer	Parent	African American	B.A.	HR work	Single
Jason	Camp Counselor	African American	B.S. in progress	Tutor and after-school teacher, full time student	Single

Rachel	Alumna, Camp Counselor Program	African American	B.A. in progress	Full time student	Single
Michelle	Administrative Assistant	African American	B.A.	Administrative Assistant	Married

Table 3.2

Student Interviewee Demographics

<i>Student Pseudonym</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Parent Level of Education</i>	<i>Parent Occupation</i>	<i>People Living in Home</i>
Arianne	12 th	African American	One parent - College	Health Coach	Mother, stepfather, two siblings
Christina	8 th	Hispanic	Some high school	Construction worker Teacher's assistant	Mother, father, two siblings
Ivanna	10 th	Hispanic	Some high school	Construction worker Teachers assistant	Mother, father, two siblings
Kiran	11 th	Asian	College	Hospitality management	Mother, father, sister
Victor	9 th	Latino	One parent - College	Distributor	Mother, father, sibling
Darius	12 th	African American	College – both parents	HR Benefits	Mother
Carlos	12 th	Hispanic/Mexican	College – one parent	Neighborhood management Shirt design	Mother, father, three siblings

Study Instruments

The research study included four instruments for data collection. In keeping with qualitative research traditions, the researcher acted as an instrument for data collection throughout the study. Demographic information was also collected as data for use in contextualizing and analyzing results. In addition, the researcher used an individual semi-

structured interview protocol to collect data from participants. Finally, the researcher collected program statistics as a source of triangulation.

Researcher as instrument. As the researcher approached this topic, she made it a priority to acknowledge her role as the research instrument (Hays & Singh, 2012). This acknowledgement refers to the process of *epoche* – refraining from judgment (Hays & Wood, 2011) and bracketing biases and assumptions before beginning the study in order to set aside her own experience and provide a fresh perspective on the research at hand (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher prioritized reflexivity – active self-awareness and reflection – in order to accomplish this (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yeh & Inman, 2007).

Researcher as instrument statement. The researcher is a White, heterosexual female from a middle-class background who is pursuing a doctoral degree in Counseling and Student Personnel Services with a social justice emphasis. The researcher comes from a background of privileged access to education. In her family, multiple people have doctoral degrees; and many have advanced degrees. Going to college was always an assumption in her background, and she had access to many necessary tasks, skills, and people to help with that transition to college. In addition to being from a middle-income family, the researcher also received scholarship money to attend college, so she never had to struggle with financial issues to fund her education until post-bachelor's work.

The researcher's professional experiences have centered on counseling students who are applying to college, and she has worked with a variety of student populations in both the Northeastern United States and the Southeastern United States. However, the researcher's primary professional work has been with predominantly upper-income students in independent school settings in the Southeast. She has a lack of experiential understanding of the challenges

facing students from low-income backgrounds on a daily basis. Though she worked one year in a charter school in Harlem, NY, that one year was not enough to give her true insight into a population unlike herself.

Because this researcher has worked closely with students applying to college and has volunteered with multiple college access programs, she had some biases based on previous experiences regarding how the program might be affecting the participants and what their experiences might be. The researcher has worked with multiple college access programs that she felt were ineffective and not serving students well. The researcher also had volunteered previously at this organization. Her continued involvement with this program included a friendship with the staff college counselor, volunteering as a speaker and chaperone at various events, and working to provide access for C5 Georgia students to certain college recruitment opportunities available to her private school students. Based on her knowledge of the inner workings of the program, her friendship with the counselor on staff, and her interactions with students and parents at program events, she had a biased view that this organization was successfully promoting college access.

In order to accomplish trustworthiness of the data, the researcher checked her assumptions and biases through multiple tools. First, the researcher took field notes on site after each contact to gather general impressions of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). These field notes were later typed up and organized to be used in data analysis. Next, she used the tool of reflexive journaling (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition, the researcher used member checking with each participant to ensure the trustworthiness of data collected. Finally, the researcher used two peer auditors to check her biases during data analysis. If the researcher did not monitor her

own biases, she might fail to identify important themes in the data gathered (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher collected program data and statistics in order to provide contextualizing information.

Demographic data as instrument. The researcher gathered demographic information from the site to use as an instrument in the study. Each participant was asked to disclose demographic information including race, occupation of self or parent(s), grade in school and school of attendance, level of education or parent(s)' education, sex, and family situation. This data was gathered in a questionnaire completed prior to the interview after consenting to participate in the study, but before beginning the interview protocol. This demographic information was used in conjunction with other data collected to provide context for the interviews conducted. Demographic information of participants is represented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

Individual interview protocol. As the primary instrument in the study, the researcher used individual interviews with information gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol (Hays & Singh, 2012). Fourteen participants took part in one semi-structured interview approximately 20-60 minutes in length. This method of gathering data allowed the researcher to ask follow-up and probing questions in order to understand participants' experiences more fully (Hays & Singh, 2012). Interviews were all audio-recorded and then transcribed into hard copy version by a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement. The researcher then listened to each interview and read each transcription multiple times before writing a summary of each interview.

The interview protocol drew from Siedman's phenomenological approach to interviewing (Seidman, 2006) and included questions that pertain to life history, details of the college access

program, and meaning of the college access program. In addition, questions were based on the research highlighted in Chapter 2. For example, Question 7 asks about family involvement (Bergin et al., 2007; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010), Question 8 asks about college aspiration (Bergin et al., 2007), Question 9 relates to academic preparation for college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna, 2005), and Question 10 discusses two of the three critical tasks for getting to college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). A copy of the interview protocols can be found in Appendix C. Table 3.3 represents how interview questions were tied to foundational research.

Table 3.3

Correlating Interview Protocol with Research

Interview Question (Questions taken from student interview protocol; other protocols used differently worded versions of the same questions)	Correlated Research
Which activities in the C5 Georgia program do you feel have been meaningful to you in the goal of getting to college? In what ways?	n/a
In what way (if any) has your family been involved in the C5 Georgia program?	(Berzin, 2010; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010)
In what way (if any) has the C5 Georgia program changed your expectations of going to college?	(Myers, Brown, & Pavel, 2010)
In what way (if any) has C5 helped you become more academically qualified for college? Follow-up question: What are some examples?	(Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001)
In what way (if any) has participating in the program increased your chance of graduating from high school? Of applying to college?	(Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001)
What (if any) college information or resources has the program provided that you wouldn't have had access to otherwise?	(Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003)
What is your perception of the summer camp experience in regards to preparing you for college?	n/a

What is your perception of the college tour in regards to preparing you for college?	n/a
What aspects of the program were not as helpful in preparing you for college?	n/a
What is your perception of the Capstone Summit in regards to preparing you for college?	n/a
What did you feel was meaningful about the program in 8 th grade? 9 th grade? 10 th grade? 11 th grade? 12 th grade?	(ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007)
Is there anything I haven't asked you that is important for you to share with me or important for me to know?	n/a

Program Statistics. The researcher also collected statistics from the Executive Director of the program as a triangulated data source. These statistics showed college attendance rates of program participants, as well as demographic information such as income status, high school of attendance, and racial group membership. Those statistics can be found in Appendix A.

Research Approach

Qualitative Research

According to Yeh and Inman (2007), qualitative research is a valuable method for gathering languaged data to describe the experiences of people. Qualitative research seeks to capture data through methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yeh & Inman, 2007) to “build a complex, holistic picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) of human experience by getting close to the human participants and their experiences (Creswell, 2006). This study used a qualitative research approach for three reasons. First, this study used an ontology of critical theory. Thus, choosing a qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to hear the voices of students from low-income backgrounds whose experiences may have been oppressed because of social or historical contexts (Ponterotto, 2005). Second, little available literature currently examines how college access programs are

promoting access to college for students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, a qualitative approach was most suitable for gathering information on how various interventions may be functioning. Third, a qualitative approach laid a foundation for future studies on these interventions. As Creswell (2006) suggested, qualitative research is most effective in cases where researchers need to explore a topic.

Research Paradigm

This study used a critical paradigm of research. This paradigm disrupts the normalized assumptions of society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), while seeking to emancipate and transform (Ponterotto, 2005). Critical theory encompasses a wide range of disciplines, and its origins trace back as far as the 1920's in Germany. At the heart of this paradigm lie two assumptions: first, that the "constructive lived experience...is mediated by power relations within social and historical contexts" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). The second central tenet of the critical paradigm of research is that the researcher is a part of an interaction that is leading to a more just society (Ponterotto, 2005). According to Creswell (2006), the critical researcher must be aware of his or her own power, dialogue with the research participants, and work toward social action. In keeping with the philosophy of a critical paradigm to bring about social change (Creswell, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005), this research inquiry sought to bring more justice to society, specifically in the area of college access for students from low-income backgrounds. The stakes involved in promoting postsecondary opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds are high, and these students are highly vulnerable to societal factors of oppression in terms of the privileges that accompany a college education. By doing a case study, this research gave students an authentic voice with which to express their experiences rather than making assumptions or imposing realities that reflect the inequities of society.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens through which this study operated came from theories of social and cultural capital. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), familiarity with favored values, norms and practices promotes success for individuals in society. Those who have understanding of those favored practices or critical networks to connect to privileges have *capital*. Capital can come in several forms such as *social capital*, which indicates relationships or group membership, or *cultural capital*, which indicates knowledge of tasks or skills.

According to Weinstein and Savitz-Romer's definition of social capital, "social networks represent interpersonal ties to people committed to and capable of transmitting vital, diversified resources" (2009, p.4). Many students from low-income backgrounds may not have connections to people who have those vital resources for accessing colleges. This study examined how those critical networks may be developed in the program. Bourdieu (1986) also discussed how parents in privileged circles socialize their children to behave in certain ways that set them up for academic success, even if the behaviors are not academic. These ways could include modes of dressing, ways of speaking, or types of body language. Based on these definitions, this study specifically examined how social capital could affect access to college. Critical networks could include access to college graduates or alumni, relationships with admissions officers, or membership in groups that hold privilege in the admissions process (e.g, legacy status, high-income families). Social capital could also include learning forms of behavior that are deemed socially acceptable for academic success such as ways of dressing or speaking.

Acquiring cultural capital is a process that happens through socialization in homes, schools, and other organizations in societies, when individuals come to understand certain cultural assumptions, norms, or practices (Bourdieu, 1986). As one author noted, that means that

students from low-income backgrounds are at a distinct disadvantage in acquiring this capital because they are often underserved in homes and schools. He goes on to note that “cultural capital is influenced by dominant cultural values, norms, and beliefs; cultural capital provides various social, political, economic, and academic advantages to certain members of society; and cultural capital is unequally distributed to members of society” (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 210). For the purposes of this study on college access, the researcher examined how cultural capital might impact students from low-income backgrounds in the process of attending college. Cultural capital in this situation could include the following: a) knowledge of tasks - such as understanding how to fill out necessary paperwork or choose appropriate courses b) knowledge of opportunities – such as various college options or scholarships c) competencies - ability to complete college application forms, and financial aid documents, d) qualifications – graduation with certain courses, SATs and extracurricular activities. In sum, this study examined how cultural capital in the form of norms, beliefs, skills or tasks may have been accessed through the college access program that might not have otherwise been accessed by the participants.

Case Study Tradition

This study used a case study method of inquiry. Case studies have been used often in social science research, usually with the goal of answering “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 2014). Case studies inquire into a unique, bounded system (the case) in order to understand a specific set of events, individuals, or programs within a specific period of time (Creswell, 2006). The purpose of a case study is to “investigate a current phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Case studies can provide insight into complex societal phenomena that occur for individuals, organizations, and others.

The case study seemed most appropriate for this study for two reasons. First, by selecting a case study method, the researcher took a stance of exploration. Due to the significant lack of literature in the field that provides any real framework within which to study the components of college access programs (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002), an open approach allowed for an exploration of student and stakeholder experiences of what might be contributing to college access in the program. The results from the case study conducted can direct future studies more quantitative in nature. Second, case study inquiry allowed the researcher to take a critical approach to the study, prioritizing student and stakeholder experiences rather than other societal or historical influences (e.g., classism, adultism) that may have thus far suppressed those experiences. Several researchers have suggested that scholars need to take a critical look at college access interventions and make sure that interventions actually help those they are designed to help, and are not imposing dominant cultural paradigms or others' assumptions of what promotes access (King, 2009; Smith, 2008).

Finally, using a case study illuminated the experiences of individuals through the use of interviewing (Moustakas, 1994); and, in accordance with feminist principles, gave voice to the experiences of those who would not otherwise have been heard (Brown, 2008). The case study inquiry allowed the researcher to gain insight into the complex social phenomena of accessing higher education by capturing the variety of experiences of those involved in the case.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Upon completion of interviewing the fourteen program stakeholders, the researcher provided audio recordings of each interview to a transcriber. This professional transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement and produced a transcript of each individual interviewer for review

by the researcher. After the transcriptions were complete, the researcher immersed herself in the data by listening to each interview a second time and by reading each of the interview transcripts twice. The researcher also wrote a summary of each interview based on the transcriptions to be used for member checking (a sample is provided in Appendix F). This summary was sent to each participant to confirm the accuracy of each transcript, and participants were invited to provide any additional feedback or thoughts after reading the summary (Hays & Singh, 2012). This member check ensured that the transcription reflected an accurate reporting of the data. Five of the fourteen participants responded to the member check with confirmation or feedback.

Data Analysis

After having gathered data from these sources, the researcher began the process of data analysis. The researcher formed a data analysis plan using several sources. First, she used the methodological resources guiding qualitative analysis, particularly in reference to basic case study procedures (Yin, 2014), but also from grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and phenomenology (Stake, 1995). The researcher then consulted with a peer auditor who had completed a qualitative research dissertation, and her dissertation committee advisors to refine the data analysis plan. Finally, the researcher formed a data analysis plan that was based on an explanatory model – looking to build a “how” or “why” answer (Yin, 2014). This plan reflected basic qualitative data analysis procedures and echoed basic case study procedures, but also borrowed elements from phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) and grounded theory. This data analysis was both inductive and theoretically based (Yin, 2014)

Code Building. First, the researcher incorporated her theoretical lens of social and cultural capital into codes. From these lenses, several *a priori* codes were developed.

- 1) Critical networks: these could include access to college graduates or alumni, relationships with admissions officers, or membership in groups that hold privilege in the admissions process (e.g., legacy status, high-income families).
- 2) Behavioral norms: these could include learning forms of behavior that are deemed socially acceptable for academic success such as ways of dressing or speaking.
- 3) Knowledge of tasks: this could include tasks such as understanding how to fill out necessary paperwork or choose appropriate courses in high school.
- 4) Knowledge of opportunities: this could include opportunities such as college choices, majors, or scholarships or internship opportunities.
- 5) Competencies: These could include the ability to complete college application forms, financial aid documents, etc.
- 6) Qualifications: These could include qualifications such as graduation with certain courses, SATs, extracurricular activities, or other qualifications.

Next, the researcher went line by line through each transcript looking for *a priori* codes. These codes were noted beside each line of data. Concurrently, the researcher identified other important ideas in the data by carefully reviewing and attempting to capture any response that did not fit into one of the previously identified codes. This concurrent identification was conducted as a form of reflexivity and as a form of exploration to see what else could be happening in the case. Thus, the researcher listed other ideas, meanings, or possible codes beside responses that did not fit the *a priori* codes. Eventually, every line of data received a code through one of these methods. Therefore, the line-by-line code building in each interview was both theoretically based (using *a priori* codes) and inductive (using unique codes). Additionally,

as the researcher identified new unique codes in each interview, she also went back to previous interviews to look at whether or not codes were in alignment. Using this method of constant comparison, she made adjustments to the data even as she was coding. The names of codes constantly shifted and changed in order to obtain the best possible description during the early data coding process.

After creating a code for each line of each interview, every code was recorded in an individual interview codebook kept by the researcher for each separate interview (again, the process of constant comparison meant that sometimes codes were retroactively shifted based on later coding). This process ensured that all possible codes were included in the codebook for each interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher did a check of each individual codebook after it was complete to ensure that it contained every code from the interview represented.

The codes that emerged after this process fell into two types: those that came from the result of the participants' experiences and explanations (resulting from the researcher's exploratory stance). The second was the type that resulted in the researcher's previously identified focus on social and cultural capital. Thus, "the process of constant comparison stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp 334-341).

As the data were constantly compared in the coding process, and subsequently organized into individual codebooks, categories began to emerge. The researcher then began looking for non-overlapping, non-repetitive expressions relevant to the experience that represented these categories (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Through this process of horizontalization, the researcher sought to understand the experience thoroughly and to identify expressions participants used in identifying their experiences.

Using the codebook for each interview, the researcher began work on a master code book. To accomplish a master code book, the researcher looked for patterns in the codes and examined the convergences and divergences in the data (Patton, 2002). She also identified important ideas, events, and themes in the data across all of the interviews that she had coded (Stake, 1995). Then, she listed what she believed were overarching themes in a beginning version of the master code book and began pasting all supportive pieces of data into this code book from the individual code books. After using all data from the individual codebooks in a first draft, she took the draft and examined it for overlaps and deficiencies. Finally, she consolidated the data into several themes that she believed represented the ideas most present in the findings. Each of these themes was listed with a definition as well as thick description of themes or “chunks” of information that described the participants’ experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). These descriptions and supporting data made up the final master code book.

In this process of reduction of these final, master themes into the themes that the researcher would report in her findings, the researcher did a complete review of the data using the identified meaning units in order to be certain that some themes had not been ignored or underrepresented. After solidifying what she believed to be dominant themes of the study, the researcher moved to the consultation phase of qualitative research. During this phase, the researcher performed several steps to ensure trustworthiness. First, a peer debriefer from the researcher’s Ph.D. cohort who was skilled in qualitative research was asked to examine two individual interviews and codebooks to ensure that researcher bias or any other factor had not influenced the coding of individual interviews. Next, another peer debriefer trained in qualitative research at a different institution was asked to review the final themes and the master codebook and give feedback. The researcher felt that having a different perspective and different

qualitative training would help the research have further trustworthiness. Finally, the researcher worked in close consultation with her dissertation committee methodologist to examine the research question and what the data said before deciding on final themes for reporting.

Case Description. The study also used the case description itself as a method of analysis (Creswell, 2006). By looking at the details and facts of the case – the program details and statistics, and participant roles – the researcher could more carefully identify the boundaries of the phenomenon and its context. Following the recommendations of case study methodologists, the researcher looked for all relevant data, acknowledged contradictory data, relied on her own expertise in this area and about the case, and allowed herself to concentrate on the most significant data during analysis (Chang, Ritter, & Hays, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Strategies for Trustworthiness

In order to create a study with strong trustworthiness, the researcher followed the principles of Lincoln and Guba (1985) of creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the internal validity or believability of a study. Transferability correlates to external validity and describes the extent to which the findings might apply to others in similar settings. Dependability demonstrates that a study is consistent across time and researchers, and confirmability means that the study accurately reflects participants and not interference from the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to bolster these areas of trustworthiness in the study, the researcher implemented several tools.

Reflexive journaling. First, the researcher kept a series of reflexive journals throughout the process in order to continue addressing her own assumptions and biases. Within one day of each encounter with students or data from this study, the researcher journalled at least one page. The

researcher also incorporated discussion with her peer auditors based on the reflexive journals in order to approach the research question with curiosity and objectivity (Creswell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Through these journals, she explored her own process of the study with the intent of remaining committed to understanding the depth and essence of her participants' experiences.

Member checking and field notes. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checking and kept field notes for each interview. Member checking occurred during the semi-structured interviews by allowing participants or the interviewer a chance to follow up or clarify statements in the interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). A summary of transcriptions from each data collection were also sent via email to each of the participants for verification that they accurately reflected the interview data. Participants had a chance to provide additional clarification or responses based on the transcripts. The researcher also kept field notes in the form of handwritten impressions of themes for each interview, as well as field notes for any other occurrences throughout the research study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Prolonged engagement and thick description. Another strategy for trustworthiness present in this study included prolonged engagement (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher had participated in C5 Georgia events as a volunteer in the past and had a strong relationship with the adult leaders of the program. In addition, the researcher conducted interviews over a period of time and continues to be involved with program events with students in order to be as immersed as possible in the culture of the C5 Georgia program and to best understand the experiences of the students. The researcher has also provided "thick description" of the experience studied (Morrow, 2005, p. 252) by using a wealth of verbatim data from the participants as well as providing as much context as possible for their voices.

Research Team and Debriefing. The researcher utilized several sources of debriefing to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. First, the researcher used two peer debriefers from different backgrounds to help ensure against bias in the data. Each peer debriefer analyzed the data and existing codes to ensure that the researcher had not missed key information because of her own biases. The research partners added any new information or codes they found in the data that they identified that had been overlooked by the primary researcher. In addition, the researcher had a great deal of input from her dissertation committee regarding the code building and data analysis. In particular, the researcher worked closely with her methodological advisor in data analysis sessions, email, and phone conversations to ensure the integrity of the data analysis process.

Triangulation. Qualitative research triangulates data as a source of trustworthiness by using multiple forms of data to describe and better understand the results of the research (Hays & Singh, 2012). In order to incorporate this strategy, the researcher triangulated data sources by using interviews with participants who had different roles in the organization. The researcher also used triangulated data sources by collecting demographic information as well as collecting statistics about the college attendance rates of participants in the program.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a college access program promoted access to college for students from low-income backgrounds through the perception of program stakeholders. The study's theoretical lens lay in cultural capital theory, which asserts that citizens navigate society through a complex set of norms and networks that bestows privilege to those with access to and information about them. Those who have understanding of those favored practices or critical networks to connect to privileges have *capital*. Capital can come in several forms such as *social capital*, which indicates relationships or group membership, or *cultural capital*, which indicates knowledge of tasks or skills (Bourdieu, 1986). By using a single-case study design and phenomenological interviewing techniques, the researcher elicited open feedback based on participants' experiences in this college access program at this time. The researcher used existing research as well as existing programmatic events to investigate the experiences of participants, and then used a lens of social and cultural capital theory to scaffold the meaning of each theme individually as well as across themes.

The researcher conducted and analyzed interviews with student and parent participants and adult stakeholders in the college access program. Through the process of qualitative data analysis, the researcher identified five themes relating to cultural and social capital present across interview participants. These themes are reported with a rich, thick description of the words of the participant (Hays & Singh, 2012) in order to capture the essence of the experiences. Figure

4.1 represents the relationships between the themes in the context of social and cultural capital. The supportive network provides a foundation for students from which to operate, while critical connections help students branch out and connect to sources of capital. The structure gives students qualifications for college, while experiences and exposure encourage growth in students that yields resilience and college readiness. All of these components work together to give students the additional social and cultural capital associated with personal growth, interpersonal connections, supportive networks, and enhanced qualifications.

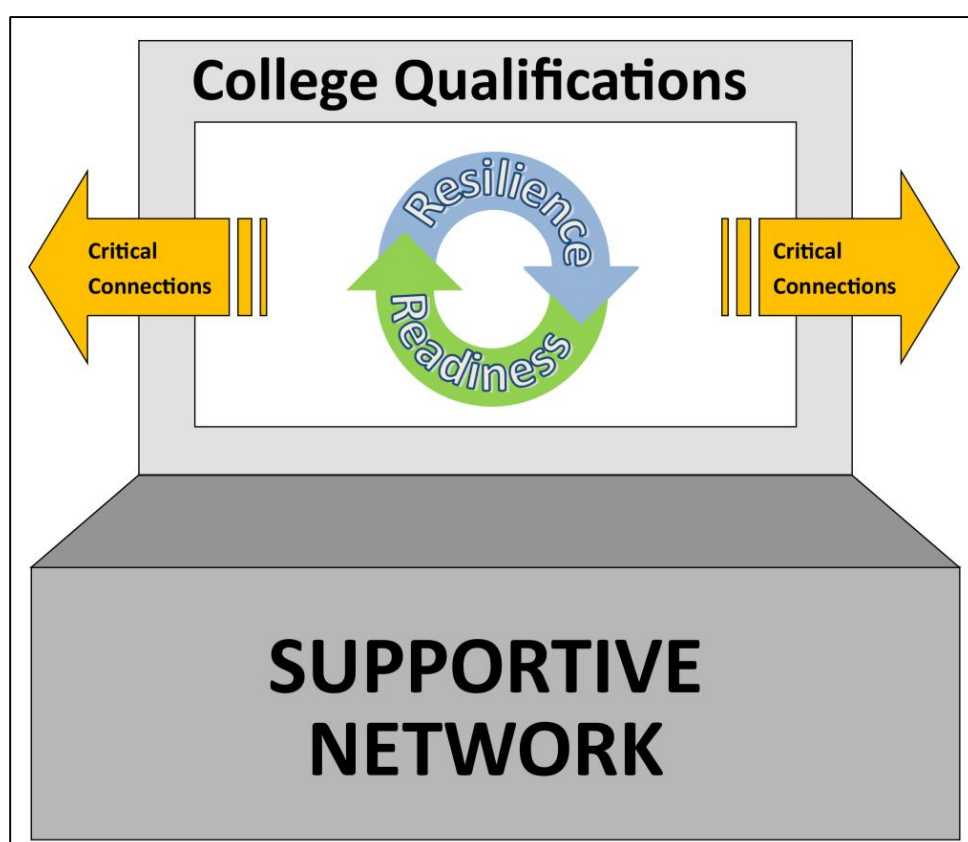


Figure 4.1. Forms of Social and Cultural Capital that C5 Georgia Gives Students from low-income backgrounds.

Additionally, in the reporting of themes, all names have been changed to reflect anonymity of the participants. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 are included below as a reference for understanding the participants in context.

Table 4.1

Adult Stakeholder Interviewee Demographics

<i>Adult Stakeholder Pseudonym</i>	<i>Role in the Program</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>
Brooklyn	Former College Readiness Program Director, Affiliated nominating counselor	African American	M.A.	Social Worker	Married
Garrett	Executive Director	Caucasian	B.A.	Executive Director of Program	Married
Heather	Current College Readiness Program Director	African American	M.A.	College Readiness Program Director	Divorced
Jennifer	Parent	African American	B.A.	HR work	Single
Jason	Camp Counselor	African American	B.S. in progress	Tutor and after-school teacher, full time student	Single
Rachel	Alumna, Camp Counselor	African American	B.A. in progress	Full time student	Single
Michelle	Program Administrative Assistant	African American	B.A.	Administrative Assistant	Married

Table 4.2

Student Interviewee Demographics

<i>Student Pseudonym</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Parent Level of Education</i>	<i>Parent Occupation</i>	<i>People Living in Home</i>
Arianne	12 th	African American	One parent - College	Health Coach	Mother, stepfather, two siblings
Christina	8 th	Hispanic	Some high school	Construction worker Teacher's assistant	Mother, father, two siblings

Ivanna	10 th	Hispanic	Some high school	Construction worker Teachers assistant	Mother, father, two siblings
Kiran	11 th	Asian	College	Hospitality management	Mother, father, sister
Victor	9 th	Latino	One parent - College	Distributor	Mother, father, sibling
Darius	12 th	African American	College – both parents	HR Benefits	Mother
Carlos	12 th	Hispanic/Mexican	College – one parent	Neighborhood management Shirt design	Mother, father, three siblings

Theme 1: Creation of a Supportive Network that Facilitates Success

“They’ll be on Facebook saying, oh, my God, I can’t wait to see my family, because they’re ... you know, [the program] is their family... having that support system and this gigantic extended family is one of the best things we can give them.”

Program Staff Member Michelle

Stakeholders perceived the creation of a supportive network for students as being a key piece of how the program promotes college access. By giving students the capital of relational support to face and overcome challenges and to accomplish their potential, the program helped students feel able to reach their college goals.

First, student participants interviewed consistently described the program as providing meaningful, supportive relationships. One way of describing these relationships was as a “family.” Students like ninth grader Victor perceived that the program provided a second family for him. The program provided a supportive and reassuring supplement for his family of origin. “[It is] like a second family they can rely on them to take care of me and stuff.” He also

described the program as a group of peers that will stay with him throughout his life. “Like that by the end of the five years, we’re like a family ... some people stay with all your life and you meet people that are really cool and stuff.”

Eleventh grader Kiran saw this “family” as even more crucial than his family of origin. “I don’t have anyone at home to get the support or motivation...through the people in the program, I’m able to get it to help me succeed.” He felt that the program “is not only like a family, but they’re like your true family, because you spend five years with them and then you go outside...and you’re still in connection.”

Six of the seven students interviewed described a time when the other students in the program had helped or supported them. Twelfth grader Carlos described his experience of getting hurt on the hiking trip and being helped by his peers. “But then like everyone from [the program], they came to me to help me.” He mentioned that he probably would have gone home without their help. “I had my bag and then like everyone just like give me some of your stuff, you know.” He felt that the program “Just helps you grow as a person and as a community. Because like to be honest...the students, I see them as my family. We’ve been five years together.” Victor talked about how he likes to “get together with other people from the program.”

Eighth grade participant Christina spoke about an event where the entire program gets together. She felt that all the students there were “cheering you on,” and that if she couldn’t figure something out, “there’s a hundred other students in the program you can help or get them to help you.” She said, “They tell you to be yourself...that’s like okay, so you can connect to other people, rather than just staying in your own bubble and try to figure it out on your own.”

Twelfth grader Darius said that the program took motivated, independent students, and “brings them together in a group. Senior Carlos also described the influence of program peer relationships on his social life:

Yeah, because at first, I was just hanging like with the wrong crowd. Like football players, we go out, party, and whatnot. And I, eventually...after two or three years, I was just like, I don't think I should just be like taking school so light...you're in this like little community and like you're just like being influenced by like goodness, you know.

All of the students interviewed also mentioned relationships with camp counselors and other program staff as being supportive and encouraging. Carlos spoke about his camp counselor who had been his counselor through all four years. He said that “Even today, we will stay in contact and he's...he's helped me. Like, because like he...like the counselors, they are students themselves.” Twelfth grader Ivanna also felt that her counselors had been an inspiration. She believed that “our counselors are really, really good.” They encouraged her to keep going and never quit. She also described a special relationship with a counselor who had been there all four years of the program with her. “We always keep in touch, and...she texts me...Merry Christmas...Or...I can be like oh, you were in [the program], so you can help me. And so like you always have like the extra helping hand. So it's never like you're alone.”

Adult stakeholders echoed the sentiments of student participants regarding the creation of a supportive network. Program assistant Michelle reflected on what she sees on a daily basis in terms of student relationships within the program. She said often a group of students gathered at the program offices. “They say they're here to do community service, but they're really here to see their friends and to ... to hang out.” She mentioned that often before summer, “they'll be on Facebook saying, oh, my God, I can't wait to see my family, because they're ... you know, [the

program] is their family.” She felt like “having that support system and this gigantic extended family is one of the best things we can give them.” College counselor Brooklyn also described how the relationships functioned to help the students. She said that students are “stuck” with the same students for five years. She says when she needs a student to do something, she responds, “Honestly, like I don’t necessarily even have to call him to do that. Like I can just call one of his classmates and they will get on him. Like it’s for me, a lot of work, not done by the staff, but because the students have relationships.”

Parents played a role in the creation of a supportive network for students as well. The program had a philosophy that educates and embraces parents, thus bolstering support networks for students. The program offered regular opportunities for parents to be involved in program events as chaperones, volunteers, providers of snacks, etc. In addition, many of the required events throughout the year also offer parent education components. The parent interviewee Jennifer discussed what she had done to participate:

Like if they helped ... needed help organizing the meals, putting like packets together, like when they have stuff at the Georgia International Convention Center, help setting up. Cleaning up, what ... those type of things...chaperoning.

Program assistant Michelle also talked about how the program supported parents. She felt that in particular the program served undocumented families by “letting them know that they can actually, you know, go to college, helping them find the ones that they can come to ... go to as an international student.”

Christina mentioned that her mother often did community service with the program. “Like when we’re at the tool bank, or when we were building that garden at a park.” Her mother would also “just do other things like bringing snacks for us, or just watching us, just parent

stuff.” She said, “My mom’s always involved. She’s like, I’ll be a chaperone...she gives people rides, or stuff.” Darius also talked about his mother’s involvement, saying that, “My mom has been a part of basically the whole [program] experience with me.” She came to almost all of the meetings, and does volunteer work with him and helped around the office.

Eleventh grade participant Kiran said that “[The program] allows your family to like help out...to volunteer...and not like...so that helps them...So like they can get more active and volunteer for things, chaperone.” Some students interviewed also revealed that their parents had gained valuable education from the program. They felt their parents had learned information that could be vital to their parents’ own personal and professional advancement in life. Kiran felt that the program “not only helps their students in public speaking and things like that, but that also helps them back to the work field and be better at it.” Kiran felt that the skills he learned in the program translated to his parents learning leadership skills and professional etiquette and skills. Ivanna mentioned this was also important, “Yeah because...my family has never like been to college.” She went on to talk about how her parents had started doing community service with her because “It’s not just like we can only do it...it would be a good growing experience for my parents, too, I mean, they don’t feel like they have to, because I’m doing it, but like they can.”

Therefore, by creating a supportive network of peers and staff, and by bolstering students’ existing family support systems, the program prepares students to face the challenges of pursuing a college education. With the support system in place, stakeholders perceived that students are set up for better success in the college process.

Theme 2: Building Resilience through Experiential Learning

“I knew that in a few days, we’d be at the top of that mountain, we’d feel really accomplished, and that is like equivalent to the degree at the end...getting a career and being successful, because I have that experience to compare to.”

12th Grade Student Participant Arianne

“They are really able to apply that [confidence] to the challenge of going to college, because a lot of them enter in, not thinking that that's an option for them, or that's even feasible or possible...for most of them it is unimaginable for them to be on a seven-day backpacking trip in the middle of nowhere...and so they can respect, okay, I accomplished Wyoming, so I can accomplish anything.”

Staff College Counselor Brooklyn

Staff, students and parents consistently spoke about the value of experiences that taught program participants how to develop resilience. For the purposes of this theme, resilience is defined as a person’s ability to adapt to and respond with ease to stressful or adverse life situations (APA, 2014). Program participants perceived these experiences as promoting their access to college because they had already learned to face challenges and overcome them. In particular, several participants noted that undertaking challenges through program pieces such as the outdoor experiences helped students understand resilience, develop it, and reflect on how it might apply to future challenges. According to Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, people gain knowledge through experience if they are actively involved, are able to reflect on the experience, and can use the new ideas gained from the experience in the future. This development of knowledge and understanding supplemented students with additional cultural capital.

Students and staff felt that these experiential learning challenges developed confidence in students to face other obstacles that might come at other times or in other ways, such as the college process. Several students reflected on what the program's hiking experience taught them about life and how it applied to college. Twelfth grade student Arianne said that the hike was like college because "when it gets hard, you can't just stop, like you have to keep going." Like college "there is a reward at the end." She "knew that in a few days, we'd be at the top of that mountain, we'd feel really accomplished, and that is like equivalent to the degree at the end...getting a career and being successful, because I have that experience to compare to." She reflected on the resilience that the hike had given her in the following answer:

On the hike, we came across a lot of obstacles. Most of them were self-obstacles, like my friends, or it would rain...or just small things that would make it really inconvenient for us. And like but I know that that's what college is going to be like, it's not just going to be a smooth ride the whole time. You're going to have professors that are difficult, you're going to have roommates that you hate, you're going to have those people in your class that don't try as hard as you do, or those friends that aren't motivated, but you just have to push through for yourself, at the end, like that is the goal. You're...you're like hiking towards your degree in a way.

Other students talked about gaining confidence to face challenges. Ivanna said that program staff "told us it wasn't just about the hike." She reflected, "The hike is just kind of like an analogy, okay, like think of life as a hike. So you can't really just give up on life and be like, okay, I quit, like I just want to sit here." Eleventh grader Kiran said, "The challenge is like, when you first go, you think that oh, we're not going to make it out of here. But you make it

through.” He then noted that, “When you go back to school, you can like share your thoughts about it and then how to face challenges that are tough in high school.”

Students recognized their growth and gained confidence from their newfound skills and abilities. Ivanna noted, “Because like, we’re low income families, so like you think you’re below, but they’re like you have potential, not even to be like standard, but like to go above. So you’re like, okay, cool. If you say so, then I’ll try it out.” Christina said, “Just like what we do...it makes you feel like, okay, like, somebody with real knowledge should be able to do this. So like I should be capable of it. And if I am, why am I slacking?” Ivanna also noted that, “I feel like now that I’m in the program, it’s like...if I don’t go to college, I kind of threw away the whole program for nothing...not going to college is like wasting my time.” Arianne said that hiking prepared her for later obstacles in life. “Like not necessarily you’re going to be in the forest and it’s going to be raining and stuff, but like you might be in a meeting and no one is taking into account what you’re saying, or just like stuff like that.” She felt that “you need to know that those things are going to happen. You have dealt with those experiences before.”

Adult stakeholders also felt that the challenges students faced in the program prepared them to face the challenge of college. College counselor Heather reflected on the value of challenging students in order to give them confidence to them take on challenges in the future. “And I think that immersion, gets them to think about putting themselves into their challenge zone back home.” Garrett talked about the experiential learning cycle of facing and overcoming obstacles throughout the program. He felt that, “it’s kind of the experiential learning cycle of the what, so what, now what? And the now what is what are you going to do with everything you’ve learned?” He postulated that students who had faced and overcome challenges might think, “Well, maybe I can try out for student government. Or maybe I can apply for a scholarship.

Maybe I can go to college.” He felt that the summer experiences “are the parts that prepare them mentally for the challenges and going to college is a challenge.”

Alumna and counselor Rachel noted that learning that they can overcome challenges builds confidence in students to approach challenges in the future. She spent a great deal of time focusing on this theme in her interview, from her perspectives as an alumna and a camp counselor. She felt that the third year hiking experience made students realize, “Or there is something that is a challenge that I accomplished that I never thought I’d be able to or even want to do, you know.” If students can accomplish that, “why can’t it be other things, there are other things in my life that meet those criteria, so I’m going to accept those challenges as well¹. And be ... and be accepting of challenges in their lives.” She noted that “things aren’t going to be easy, but they will be worth it and they will teach you something, rather than just what you think.” She felt that students in the program “are really able to apply that [confidence] to the challenge of going to college, because a lot of them enter in, not thinking that that’s an option for them, or that’s even feasible or possible.” She said that for so many students is it “completely unimaginable for them to be on a seven-day backpacking trip in the middle of nowhere,” and when they come back home, “everything that they do, they look at it as a challenge. And so they can respect, okay, I accomplished Wyoming, so I can accomplish anything.”

The other camp counselor Jason said that the hike applies to everything else in life for students. He felt that “if our students get that knowledge that there is a difference between what they can’t do and they won’t be able to do, and apply that to the college experience.” He thought they learn that they can get into college and they learn to ask what is the next step to take to be

able to get there. “So maybe their mountain in real life is gaining meaningful employment, or getting into UGA or whatever.” Former staff member Brooklyn shared her experiences watching what students learned from approaching challenges:

[They said] I'm not really sure how, you know, I'm going to be able to afford this and that, and the other. And I'm like yeah, but were you able to figure out how you were going to buy boots when you went to, you know, Wyoming or ... have a hard time trying to figure out how you were going to hike 65 miles, like you know, like those things always came back up.

Garrett also noted that students' confidence in their new skills and abilities shows. He said students start to “come out of their shells” and “definitely they have more confidence and more skills.”

Therefore, the program helped students to access college by giving them experiences that built resilience in students and prepare them to face future challenges on the path to college. Through having experiences such as overcoming a weather obstacle, or accomplishing a hike they did not think they could have accomplished, students learned confidence in their abilities to persevere. Perhaps more importantly, they learned through experience and reflection to apply these lessons to their college goals, thus taking that confidence with them into the college process.

Theme 3: Providing Students with Critical Connections

“You get to meet a lot of people...and sometimes they're really, really important people. So let's say I need like a recommendation to go to college, I can ask one of those people and they'll know how I am.”

8th Grade Student Participant Christina

“The resources are slim as far as a one-on-one conversation about college...being able to have somebody who has a connection either to the colleges and being able to somebody that's able to give them things like test prep booklets, you know, from private organizations, being able to get them documents like, you know, a tracking sheet for their college applications, or you know, how to you know, actual recommendation letter, all of those things, are things that they have gotten through [the program] and not necessarily through their college counselor or obviously even through a parent.”

Staff College Counselor Brooklyn

Another way in which interviewees felt that the program helped students gain access to college was by connecting students to people who could provide critical sources of information or capital. All participants mentioned access to these types of resources in their interviews, primarily in three categories. First, students had access to people who were influential or wealthy and thus could provide capital in the forms of connection or money. Next, students had access to admissions officers and college personnel who had valuable information regarding college. Finally, students had regular access to staff personnel who had capital in the form of specialized training or college experiences that they could share with students.

This program connected students to donors and other influential or wealthy community members on a regular basis. These individuals often shared with students their resources, knowledge and experience. In particular, student participants viewed connections with powerful or wealthy people as being particularly helpful in accessing college. Twelfth grader Darius talked about raising money for the capstone summit, “I had to introduce myself, like basically just make connections. If I ever need their help, like getting money...I can probably ask them

for like a loan to college or something, or help me find scholarships.” Twelfth grader Carlos met an Apple executive from Apple at one of the programs and had the following reflection:

So like I met this guy from Apple and he basically told me about how the whole Apple system works, and I went to the one by Atlanta. And I actually did stay in contact with him, and he even gave me a free iPad. So which was like nice. Or, you know, sponsors that come here, sometimes...and you get to know them, stay in contact with them. And just it starts from there.

Student participant Christina was only in eighth grade, but her feelings echoed the experiences of Carlos and Darius. She said the program helped students get to college because “You get to meet a lot of people...and sometimes they're really, really important people. So let's say I need like a recommendation to go to college, I can ask one of those people and they'll know how I am.”

From an adult perspective, former staff member Brooklyn talked about how the program facilitates these experiences for students:

The Coke team, they come up [to Sunday barbecues] or you know, the Enterprise team, they come up, or GE might come up and host a barbecue. And during that, then also the students would have an opportunity to talk to career professionals about what they do for, you know, for whatever company and how they got there and all of that kind of stuff.

Therefore, it seemed that the community members affiliated with the program had substantial resources, such as an iPad, to offer students, but they also brought students a feeling of confidence that they knew someone important who they might contact in the future.

Next, both student and adult interviewees noted the importance of relationships with people in the college admissions offices. Twelfth grader Carlos talked about what his group did

on their college tour the year before, and how they met important people from the college. He said, “We would meet the...not the dean, but the head people from their colleges. Yeah, like the actual like important people, I guess...like have one-on-one conversations.” The parent interviewed felt strongly that meeting people in the colleges helped her son in the college process. First, she talked about how the program itself formed relationships with schools, connecting students to those people and even connecting them to a scholarship and other things. She said, “So we’ve been really lucky to have those relationships where the schools will actually come out and give that personal touch to students. Whereas they, you know, might not have it if they ... if their high school has a college fair or whatever.” She then went on to discuss how her son himself had developed personal relationships with college admissions officers thanks to the program. “So he ended up having a relationship with the admissions officer at Elon, so he can call her directly, and he ... she ... she recognizes him by face, he recognizes her by ... you know, they have a ... a direct relationship.” In her mind, this was important for the following reasons:

So he can call on her, like what do I need to do? I mean, where ... where do I stand?

You know, he has that ... a rapport where a lot of kids, I guess, I wouldn't have that, you know, have that rapport. So those ... based on those direct points of contacts, he can call ... reach out to those admissions people to find out exactly where he stands, what needs to be done.

Program assistant Michelle noted that on the tour students are not only meeting administrators, but also students who are already in college. She said students get answers to the questions that are pressing them, “See, because a lot of them, they care about, you know...What's campus life going to be like? What kind of sororities do they have? Getting them

to meet with the students and student-run organizations...that helps them.” Therefore, whether it was admissions officers, administrators, or even students, the program connected students with university affiliates who could provide them with invaluable information about college that they did not have access to without the program.

Adult and student stakeholders also perceived that having access to the capital provided by specialized or experienced personnel helped them on the path to college. The program staff included an administrative assistant, a college counselor, a program director, and a wide variety of volunteer affiliated specialists who do occasional work with the students, included school counselors, scholarship counselors, admissions professionals, and others. These personnel brought students access to skills and knowledge that many students from low-income backgrounds do not have access to in their schools or homes. The former college counselor Brooklyn talked about her role as giving them access to specialized personnel that is unavailable in their school:

I will say that for most of them, because they are in larger public schools, the resources are slim as far as a one-on-one conversation about college. I think also being able to have somebody who has a connection either to the colleges and being able to somebody that's able to give them things like test prep booklets, you know, from private ... private organizations, being able to get them documents like, you know, a tracking sheet for their college applications, or you know, how to you know, actual recommendation letter, all of those things, are things that they would have gotten through [the program] and not necessarily through their college counselor or obviously even through a parent

She noted that she ran a college application boot camp for students, and many of the students told her “I just don’t have anywhere that I can do my applications or the places or the times that I

could, like they're not conducive to the student. It was like I have to ride later, or even when I can get a ride, I just don't ... you know, I can't stay at school." By providing help to the students at a time available to them, students were able to complete applications they might not otherwise have completed.

The participants in the program perceived the help of these specialized personnel as being incredibly valuable, especially in contrast to the resources available in school. Jennifer noted "You go to school and you know, your college counselor, you know, he has a ton of kids, so they can't really... So I think [the program] have put different steps in place." She said that the program did things that school personnel weren't able to do. "These are the things that you need to do, if you need help, we will help you. If you need tutorial help, we will help you. I mean, if you need help doing your college applications, we will help you." The students mentioned specific personnel throughout the interviews. For one, a scholarship guru mentioned brought specialized information to students. "Well, there's this guy named [guru] and he comes and he talks. He's kind of like a coach on how to get scholarships and stuff." (Christina) They mention the college counselor in the program as an immediately available resource, "Well, they ... well, I know [Heather]. She sends out scholarships and like every day, like she sends ... and then [guru], like I wouldn't have known about [him] if I wasn't in [the program]" (Arianne). Tenth grader Ivanna said, "So I can go ask [Heather] she's in charge of like Go to College, so I can go to her and be like oh, so what do you know?"

Some stakeholders also mentioned that staff members had college experience and shared these experiences with students. This knowledge about the college experience is a form of cultural capital that most of the students in the program would not have accessed otherwise. Carlos noted that his camp counselor had given him an idea of what college would be like. "My

counselor, he goes to UGA. And he's like ... he basically showed me like stuff about like UGA, like even though I don't want to go to UGA, but like still like it helped me like grab new knowledge."

Another student felt that staff members were instrumental in helping give college experience advice and support to students aspiring to college. "Most important, is having people I trust say, I looked for a campuses that were small, because I wanted to be private, I wanted to know my professors. Just being able to have some conversations with staff members was important." Former staff member Brooklyn felt that having camp counselors around introduced scholarship and other helpful information to students in a different way.

If you have a bunch of 19, 20 year old counselors, you know, going around and talking about their college experience, and I'm part of Posse, and oh, I'm a Coke scholar, and all of that, like that is what piques the interest of the students. And so the students were then able to find out, do research and interview their counselors or other counselors that just happen to be on camp to find out about oh, what's Posse?

In conclusion, students in this program were introduced to several sources of cultural and social capital that gave them connections and knowledge they would not have had otherwise. Students accessed people and information to gain feelings of confidence in their ability to connect to the world of college. They also benefitted from the connections, information, and skills provided by these people. Because of the impact on the college process these connections provided, they were perceived by all stakeholders as being an extremely important part of how the program promotes access to college.

Theme 4: Promoting College Readiness by Exposing Students to Collegiate Environments and Skills

“To actually like step in a college and like oh, so this is what is, this is what a normal classroom looks like on a daily basis, like this is how we work things... you get more a feel for what college is like.”

10th Grade Student Participant Ivanna

Throughout the interviews, both student and adult stakeholders noted that students were exposed to opportunities to experience college environments and practice college skills. The opportunities mentioned most frequently were exposing students to college campuses and college life and providing opportunities for students to practice behaviors and skills appropriate for the college environment.

Students interviewed for the study repeatedly discussed the impact of the college tours on their perceptions of their college opportunities. Tenth grade student participant Ivanna described the impact a college visit had on her: “We actually like slept in the dorms and stuff. It gives you the feeling of what college is like and how it is...because online you only see pictures.”

Eleventh grade student Kiran noted that, “You go on college tours...you stay at the colleges for a few days, and you get a feeling of...what a college life is.” Ivanna also mentioned, “To actually like step in a college and like oh, so this is what is, this is what a normal classroom looks like on a daily basis, like this is how we work things... you get more a feel for what college is like.”

Twelfth grader Darius noted that visiting colleges helped him realize the many kinds of people who go to college. He realized that “people are basically the same, it’s just our background that makes us different, and that is a part of college life.”

From a staff perspective, program director Garrett noted that program facilitators always try to plan a variety of stops when they visit campuses, including students, programs, and faculty. “And then they also get to do some activities and hopefully get them to think like that...just living in a dorm ...getting them prepared for what that would feel like and what it’s going to take to ... to do that.” Twelfth grader Carlos talked about what he learned about getting tips from a student on a college tour, “[when we were at] FAMU, I would speak to a graduate or a kid that’s doing filming and like I would like have a one-on-one conversation with them and be like so what do I have to do in high school, so I can be okay in college?”

In addition, by visiting out-of-state colleges, participants in the program learned that they could attend college in another state. Twelfth graders Carlos, Darius, Arianne, and alumna Rachel all voiced the feeling that traveling to out of state colleges had provided them with new options for college. In addition, they all applied to an out-of-state college they had visited. Eighth grader Ivanna voiced the excitement of younger students in the program about knowing more college options, “So you get to learn like...they don’t only tell you about colleges in like the state, like they let you experience out of state and stuff, because that’s also an option to go out of state.” Arianne felt like the visits “opened my mind, to like different perspectives and different colleges. It brought me new knowledge. And I applied to Utah State, which I never would have done before.”

Visiting colleges also helped students learn through experience how to find a college opportunity that fit their interests and need. Twelfth grader Darius talked about what he had learned from his travels on the college tours. He felt that he had learned “that you have to have a preference” and spoke about “if you live in a big city and you want to go to a big city school like Georgia Technology or Georgia State, you have to be prepared for like traffic, all the noise, all

the lights.” Alternatively, he learned, “If you go to a college that’s like in the middle of the country, or the middle of nowhere or something like that, you have to be prepared to make your own fun.” Arianne also learned a lot from the college tour, “I know I want to be somewhere warm, and I know that I want dorms and teams and specific majors and it just ... I didn't think about it so much when I was ... well, before the college tour.” She felt that the opportunity to visit colleges “just really opened my eyes to what I'm looking for.”

Students also had opportunities to learn skills and behaviors that prepare them for a college environment. Program director Garrett mentioned this opportunity for students to learn appropriate behaviors in many settings. “Students have an opportunity to represent the program in multiple events, to local colleges, on an exchange in China, and in the community.” As a result, students felt that they knew how to behave in professional ways, and how to “act in that type of world” (Ivanna). Student participant Ivanna also reported that she learned how to act “at a certain professional level,” including learning how to dress and “like just even the smallest detail, like firm handshake or posture and stuff.”

Carlos expressed his prior discomfort in situations where he did not feel that he knew the appropriate behaviors or how to understand the opportunities offered. After being in the program, he felt that his experiences had taught him how to ask for information when he needed it. When speaking about his experience of going to a college fair, he expressed the following feeling, “And before I like I ... I ignored them and like now like [the program], they taught me how to like communicate with those people in college fairs, like know how to ask the right questions, and like they teach you like basically how to like get the correct information.” Thus, these students had learned how to navigate in environments that were more similar to college, helping to prepare them for success in the college process and beyond.

Additionally, the program gave students exposure to independent living in order to prepare them for college. Parent Jennifer felt that students learned this skill in the program through their experiences. She noted that when her son goes to college, he will be on his own, and she won't be there to go meet with the principal or the dean. She thought, "He would need to understand that you're in a class of 200 ... it could be 200 kids, you just can't go meet with the professor when you don't understand something." Former counselor Brooklyn mentioned how crucial the camp experience was for getting students away from home and teaching them they could live independently, "Yeah, I think the thing that's most meaningful for them is the fact that they're able to go away from home for 25 days, with people they don't know." Michelle echoed this sentiment. "So I think it kind of helps them get on the page of, you know, I'm going to have to do this with my motivation, like when I go off to college, my mom is not going to be there to wake me up and tell me to do my homework. Like I have to do it myself."

Twelfth grade student Darius, looking forward to his first year of college, also talked about his exposure to living with others in the program. He noted that he would soon be sharing a dorm room with someone, and would have a roommate and would have to share a bathroom. He learned how to live with others "in enclosed spaces, how to keep your hygiene up, stuff like that." He also mentioned learning multicultural competency, and his belief that learning to live and work with others different from himself would be valuable to him in his success in life. He felt that he learned how "To be open minded, learning how to respect other races, other ethnicities and other cultural backgrounds." He felt that right now, "A lot of students live in areas where it's only black, or it's only white, or it's only Hispanic. And [the program] brings a

lot of those different races together, influences together. I'd never seen an Asian before, like I'm...I've never seen an Asian before, and one of my closest friends in [the program] is an Asian from Burma.”

Finally, the program gave students exposure to exercises in teamwork, time management, and leadership through their experiences with program components. For example, students in the program worked together to do projects such as the capstone project in twelfth grade, and also smaller projects such as the 24-hour film project or create a restaurant night at camp. The executive director spoke about these experiences and what they taught students:

They get a little, you know, they get a daily budget...for their day, they can decide if they have 30 dollars, how they want to spend that on food, for example....And the same with the 24 hour production. They need to put on a play...So that's costumes, that's sets, that's direction, that's actors, that's scripts. And so it really pushes them into a new place, a challenging place...So it's almost completing the task, because you ask more ... you know, self-motivated, self-driven, just like a college experience. So no one is watching them every day, but by the end, they need to get up and present their ideas and have speakers and own a whole day of the program.

College counselor Brooklyn talked about the purpose of these activities and how they equipped students with applicable, practical skills for college. She felt that the capstone summit prepared students to work in groups, in a committee, and how to “build a project from beginning to end, delegating responsibilities.” She felt like the capstone summit project and other experiences is “learning the soft skills and the hard skills of actually doing an application, taking an SAT, or an ACT,” so it directly relates to college access. Also, other components such as So there are “interviewing skills, being able to present in front of a live group, being able to solicit

donations” all give students the “soft skills of college.” Student participant Victor noted that these experiences “teach you to work together.” Tenth grader Ivanna felt that the program had helped her “communication skills...like it helps me more to talk to people.” She also felt that it had encouraged her to be proactive, to be “the one asking for input, instead of like being the one waiting.” When it comes to working on projects, she felt, “I’m going to be like, oh, yeah, I’ve done this before, like oh, yeah, I know how to work on Excel, because I’ve done it before...so like I’m familiar with it, or you know, I’m familiar with working on a team because I’ve done it before.”

Theme 5: Structuring Program Requirements Longitudinally to Produce College-Qualified Students

“I think that’s what is important about our program. I think it navigates for the five years of the program. When you look at your like ... say, 8th grade through high school, those are very important. Those are the years you’re maturing, you’re going to high school, you’re making some serious decisions that really will affect the rest of your life. It’s like you didn’t even realize what you were doing, but you did it...you have your map.”

Program Alumna and Staff Member Rachel

The final way in which stakeholders perceived that the program promoted access to college for students was through its program requirements over time that helped students become more college qualified. Students, staff and parents felt that by monitoring academics, helping students create and follow a college plan, and providing opportunities to enhance college qualifications, the program ensured that students had strong college qualifications at the end of the program. The program built the credentials for students, thus giving them further capital when embarking upon the college process.

First, program staff monitored the academics of the students who were participating by requiring a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.5 to stay in the program. By having a GPA requirement, the program was able to keep track of students' performance and progress and supply them with help where needed. Program assistant Michelle described the process whereby the program receives academic information on its students. "Twice a year, they're required to turn in their report cards to us and we go through and the ones who had fallen beneath our 2.5 grade point average. We reach out to them and help them find resources to pull that grade up." Former counselor Brooklyn described the process of what happened with that information in her interview. She noted that one of her responsibilities with the program was to make sure the students were maintaining their grades. She said she would often reach out to students and check in about their grades. "So, hey, John, Student A, or whatever, you know, I see that you got this C in chemistry, you know, is there something I can help you with? Can we pair up with another student who is excelling in chemistry and maybe you all can tutor, you know, what are the issues that you're having in this class." She noted that the program doesn't offer math classes or tutoring workshops, but the students "leaned us on as a resource for them to either gain additional help in a subject or find additional help for them to excel."

From the student perspective, participants described the monitoring of their academic work as something that was motivating and supportive. Twelfth grade student Carlos described his experience with the academic monitoring aspect of the program. He described the program as "the good crowd." This meant "They tell you do good in school, send me your report card every month, make sure to call me. And if you need help at school, they do help you. Like if you need a tutor or something...you can call and they will come and help you." Alumna interviewee Rachel agreed that the program helped her find tutoring when needed and were generally there to

help, as did the two other twelfth graders interviewed Arianne and Darius. However, Carlos went one step further in that he felt that the academic monitoring piece of the program changed his trajectory in high school.

I used to be a C average student. And then they told us, they were like if you need help at school, we're here for you...this is your family, and after awhile, you know, I started going...reaching out to like counselors or students, and we just help each other. And just...ninth grade, I was failing lit, my first semester, and I was just like, I'm not going to pass this. And I reached out...if they could help me...But like they found me someone close to me and just tried to like find someone that could help. Basically, like he just helped me through my classes.

Thus, by monitoring academics over time, the program helps students achieve the motivation and the qualifications needed to achieve their college goals at the end of the program.

Next, the program helped students become college qualified by creating and implementing longitudinal college planning for each student. Six of the seven students mentioned that they had initially planned to go to college, even before entering the program. However, a general theme emerged from their narratives that without the program, they might not have had the specific planning or skills needed to accomplish that initial goal. Students such as eleventh grader Kiran felt that the program had “showed them the path,” and he noted that though he has to put forth the effort, “They have like helped us stay on track of what we need to do to be on time for graduation and go to college...it shows us like, what you should do in ninth grade to get to college, etc.” Tenth grade student Ivanna spoke about how the program

encouraged her to meet with her counselor to stay on track for graduation. “I went to like make sure I’m on like my graduation requirements, and make sure I’m on my right track...to graduate on time.”

Other students also spoke about the program as providing guidance through the graduation and college application process. Senior Arianne mentioned her aspiration to go to college, but her feeling that she can have a “tighter grip” on that goal now. She felt that without the program she could “listen to stores that my mom would have told,” but because of the program, “I know what I want to do. Like I said, I was going to go to college, I knew that. I knew I was going to graduate, but it [the program] definitely helps the process. Interviewee Rachel was both an alumnus of the program and a camp counselor at the summer camp. She described it as the program acting as a “navigator” and providing a “map” to college in the following dialogue:

I think that’s what is important about our program. I think it navigates for the five years of the program. When you look at your like ... say, 8th grade through high school, those are very important. Those are the years you’re maturing, you’re going to high school, you’re making some serious decisions that really will affect the rest of your life. If you’re talking about going to college, you know, students who drop out... [the program] wants to get you before you are able to fall off track or before you’re able to just make some decisions that are really detrimental to any future that you want to have. It’s like you didn’t even realize what you were doing, but you did it...you have your map.

From the adult stakeholder perspective, several interviewees noted that this practical planning and guidance over time helped changed idealistic goals into realistic goals. Garrett phrased it in this way. “I’m sure they’ve thought that that’s [college] might where they end up,

but we really show them the track to get into the college.” Brooklyn had the same perception, and phrased it in this way: “I think, first and foremost, it makes them realize it [college] is possible. And then, after that, I think it makes them realize what they need to do to make it possible.” Alumnus and counselor Rachel echoed this sentiment, “I think it is something that maybe our students definitely have as a goal for themselves, but it feels like it is something that is attainable, that’s an achievement that they really want to accomplish.” She noted, “after being in [the program] and maintaining your GPA and doing your community service, there’s no ... it’s no ... it’s not hard for you to graduate from high school.” She felt that the program led students through the steps needed to graduate and get to college. “Because you’ve been set up. Like you have been doing all these things, and you’re just...you’ve been set up in a good position where there’s no other way but for you to graduate high school.” Finally, Rachel felt that understanding what they need to do increases student’s chances of applying to college, because “if you are confused about what needs to happen, then it’s unlikely you’ll ever step forward.”

Both the current and former college counselors noted that the program also integrated opportunities for students to accomplish the practical work needed in their college plan, on their applications, and rather than telling them what to do, walked them through the process of doing it. One example was the opportunity to complete an application with the help of the college counselor. Heather noted, “We’ve exposed them all to the common application, which we’ve helped every student to fill out. So at least an application where they ... they’re ... they’re forced to at least do one.” Heather and BrookC5 n both spoke about the boot camp, where 12th grade students receive assistance completing applications and are required to finish an application as a program requirement. Brooklyn noted, “This would have been probably one of the most crucial

parts of, you know, the students actually going off to college just because a lot of them don't have the opportunity to do it, you know at their own school or do it at home."

Finally, the program implemented college planning over time that helped students increase their credentials for college applications. Five students indicated that taking part in extracurricular or service activities such as those required for the program would help build resumes for getting into college. Multiple students mentioned that having community services hours would be something to list on an application, such as twelfth grader Arianne who indicated that now "you have all these community services hours under your belt." Darius mentioned that, "Applying to college, I guess, will be easier, because after graduating [the program], you are more than likely to have over 250 hours of community service." Victor discussed how he initially felt that he wasn't sure he could go to college, but after completing the requirements of the access program, he was now a qualified applicant, "And I believe most colleges, like ... like they don't want you just to be smart enough, but they want you to do like more activities and stuff, so that would help."

The twelfth grade students reflected on their level of qualification as applicants after having completed the requirements of the program. Darius felt that his service hours and activities with the program, "makes it [your application] stronger, because a lot of kids I know, after looking in the guidance office at my school, don't have anything to put down with community service." Arianne felt that because of her service and her trip to China, "I actually have a lot of things that I could say, and a lot of things that I could write about and a lot of skills that I have obtained over these years, or developed, that I could write about and develop my personality in an application."

Students also had access through the program to practical opportunities to enhance their entrance qualifications, such as SAT scores, applications and essays. Three students mentioned the opportunities for test preparation, including student participant Ivanna, “Oh, and they gave us a packet, like how you can study for the like PSAT, now that we’re like freshmen, we’re going to take it as sophomores and stuff.” Three of the program staff mentioned the process of preparing for specific qualifications such as standardized tests or essays. Parent interviewee Jennifer reflected on not only the practical help of this preparation, but the college thinking it encouraged. “And the whole year of them preparing for taking their SATs or being geared towards those resources that they need...you wanted to ask questions about what it means to be on the search for a college or what it means to take SATs or the ACTs or anything of that sort, like I think it opens a lot of dialogue.” Finally, Brooklyn talked about the application boot camp where students had an opportunity to work on their actual applications. “The seniors got a chance to do a senior boot camp, so they all came in the week before school started. They started a Common App, did some scholarship searching, worked on essays, all of that kind of stuff.”

Jennifer also spoke about the positive influence of the program in giving her son college qualifications. She felt that it had increased his motivation to take AP and other challenging classes, and giving him opportunities to build his resume. “You know, taking those AP courses or honors courses. I think if... when he’s around, other children and...when they’re in those academically challenged classes, it ... it encouraged him to be in those academically challenged classes.” Finally, Brooklyn connected that students increase their behaviors for acquiring college qualifications after understanding what those are.

I think after that, after hearing either students or admissions reps or college reps, from you know, wherever, kind of just talk about what needs to happen as far as their grades

and their extracurriculars and their essays and testing and all of that, I think then the student starts to realize, okay, now I need to go get these things done.

Therefore, the interviewees felt that the program promoted access to college by intentional planning that occurred across time and gave students the opportunity to be college qualified by the time they reached the application process.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides discussion of the findings along with practical considerations based upon the data resulting in the study's themes. In keeping with the philosophy of a critical paradigm to bring about social change (Creswell, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005), this research inquiry sought to bring more justice to society, specifically in the area of college access for students from low-income backgrounds. By condensing the themes and connecting them to current literature, the researcher discusses implications for current practitioners, counselors, parents, and policy makers, as well as recommendations for future research in order to help change society in a way that is more equitable for students from low-income backgrounds in their pursuit of higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to current research literature by understanding how a college access program promoted access to postsecondary education for students from low-income backgrounds. The study sought to answer one primary research question: How do program stakeholders perceive that C5 Georgia functions to promote college access for students from low-income backgrounds? By using the perceptions and experiences of program stakeholders gained from interviews to better understand what promotes college access for students from low-income backgrounds, the researcher produced data that resulted in five themes. The study included seven student and seven adult stakeholder interviews. The

researcher used a case study method research design and analyzed the information gathered. The discussion that follows emerged from findings taken from these interviews.

Summary of Results

After a qualitative analysis of the data using horizontalization, constant comparison of codes, and multiple research consultations, five themes were identified from the data. These themes explained how stakeholders felt the program was promoting access to college for students from low-income backgrounds. Figure 5.1 illustrates the relationship among these themes and the fact that all themes are providing forms of social and cultural capital to students in the program. The five themes are:

- a) creation of a supportive network that facilitates success
- b) building resilience through experiential learning
- c) providing students with critical connections
- d) promoting college readiness through exposure to collegiate environments and skills
- e) structuring program components over time to produce college-qualified students.

Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2008) encouraged the development of social capital through access interventions as a primary form of helping. Several other scholars have explored college access from the angle of social and cultural capital and the role of those factors in increasing college enrollment behaviors (e.g., Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). The themes represented in Figure 5.1 add to the prior scholarly discussion of capital.

Theme 1: Creation of a Supportive Network that Facilitates Success

One theme that emerged from stakeholders' interview data was a perception that having a supportive "family" of students, staff and parents helped students achieve the goal of going to college. One of the program's clearest cultural pieces was the nature of the relationships between and among students, parents, and staff in the program. Interviewees consistently

referred to the program as a “family” and described supportive, encouraging, and helping relationships that existed between and among students, between and among staff, and between and among students and staff.

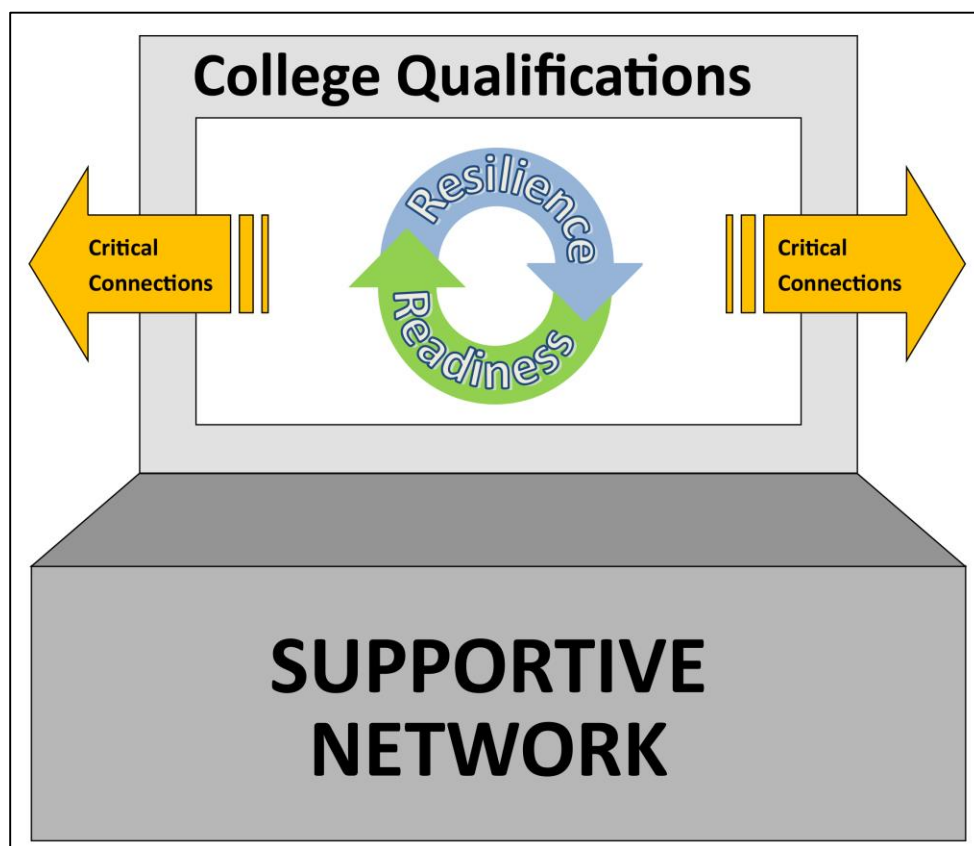


Figure 5.1. Forms of Social and Cultural Capital that C5 Georgia Gives Students from low-income backgrounds

This theme echoed the discussion of social support groups and peer influences found in Tierney, Colwin, and Colyar’s (2005) publication. Students who participated in this program consistently felt that they had a “family” and a source of supportive relationships by being a part of this program. Notable is the fact that participants in the study often referred to specific times when students needed help; these relationships functioned not only as a social support, but also as a safety net during times of struggle or lack of other sources of help. By giving students the capital of relational support to face and overcome challenges and to reach their potential, the

program helped students feel capable to reach their goals of attending college. It would seem, therefore, that other college access work with low-income students means providing time and opportunities for them to develop relationships with other students in the program, as these relationships can act as a source of support.

Embracing and educating parents was also a component of creating this supportive network. This finding relates to arguments found in the research that parents from low-income backgrounds want to be involved in promoting college access, but do not have the social capital to do so (Smiths, 2008; Tierney, Colwin, & Colyar, 2005). As if in response to their suggestions, this program provided ways for interested parents to become involved in college access, and also provided them with education in the process. A review of the research indicated that “parental support is one of the most important indicators of students’ educational aspirations” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010, p. 117). In particular, parents from low-income backgrounds are likely to face obstacles in obtaining appropriate college and financial aid information and so they see postsecondary education as unattainable. Without family member support and approval, students are unlikely to realize aspirations for postsecondary pursuits (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). While this program successfully involved parents from low-income backgrounds who were interested and wanted to learn, many other programs intentionally sideline parents in an effort to provide students with the opportunities needed. This program is a model for how a college access program can promote access to college by equipping not only the students, but also the parents. If college access advocates and practitioners take a critical theory approach to parent involvement in access programs working with populations from low-income backgrounds, they open up opportunities for parents to grow as well as students.

It is worth noting that offering both students and parents an opportunity to grow and access new opportunities is offering them an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. Some student participants mentioned that they felt their parents were better equipped to act in professional ways or obtain jobs. Parents felt empowered to support their children instead of being sidelined. As a result, students were more supported in their families of origin as well as within the program. This point is of immense importance as scholars and practitioners look for best practices in college access work. Having an open and inclusive stance toward parents should be a priority.

Students in the program gained a supportive network of students and staff who acted as a “family” for them. This support provided capital in the form of relational resources and support to students who perhaps lacked that capital in their families of origin or school settings. In addition, by educating and embracing parents, the program bolstered students’ existing capital in their families of origin. C5 Georgia powerfully impacted these students’ chances of going to college by providing this capital to students who now felt they had more people who believed in them, who they could call on for help, and who would support them in achieving their goals.

Theme 2: Building Resilience through Experiential Learning

Staff, students and parents consistently spoke about the value of students undertaking outdoor challenges through the program as a way to build their ability to face adverse situations in life. These outdoor experiences helped students understand resilience, develop it, and reflect on how it might apply to future challenges. According to Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning, people gain knowledge through experience if they are actively involved, are able to reflect on the experience, and can use the new ideas gained from the experience in the future.

This development of knowledge and understanding through outdoor experiences supplemented students with additional cultural capital in the form of resilience in the face of adverse life circumstances.

The experiential learning opportunity discussed most frequently by students, staff, and parents was the long outdoor hiking experience in which students participate during their third year in the program. The weeklong hiking experience in Wyoming took students far out of their comfort zones, and exposed them to challenges they had never faced (e.g., flying on a plane, hiking up a mountain, or dealing with injuries or sustenance issues). Every student who participated in the hike felt that it gave him or her an experience of being challenged in a new way and overcoming the adversity of the hike within the support of the program. With counselors and peers, students reflected on and debriefed these experiences, eventually translating them to their abilities to do other things, such as go to college. Because of their experiences with outdoor trips, students felt they could now “hike to college.”

Students and staff felt that outdoor experiential learning challenges developed confidence in students to face other obstacles that might come at other times or in other ways. Several stakeholders indicated that facing the outdoor learning challenges bolstered students’ abilities to confront other new challenges such as the college process. Students who had participated in the program experiences reflected that they now knew how to better tolerate times of discomfort and challenge, and they understood that these times would be a part of life. However, they felt equipped to face new challenges, even those that posed discomfort or risk. Students expressed a sense that perseverance through challenge held rewards, and they were ready to face new challenges (e.g. attending college), in order to obtain the rewards (e.g., a degree). Thus, students from the program learned through experience how to face and overcome new adversity. This

experiential learning opportunity gave students the ability to have more capital in the form of resilience in order to face future challenges involved in accessing a college education.

One noteworthy component of this finding is the confidence and resilience C5 students possessed because of their work with the program. Of particular importance are the opportunities that the program gave students not only to face new challenges such as a camping trip, but to reflect on those challenges and apply them in an analogous way to future challenges. It, therefore, seemed that a best practice would be to seek opportunities to provide challenge for students, but to couple those challenges with reflection time. For programs less resourced than C5 Georgia, these challenges might be something on a smaller scale such as a ropes course or a day hike, but the opportunities should be something that give students a feeling of apprehension about an experience, a novel or challenging experience, and an opportunity to reflect on that experience. Then, staff can help students apply that reflection as they move through challenges along the path to college.

Theme 3: Providing Students with Critical Connections

Another way in which interviewees felt that the program helped students gain access to college was by connecting students to people who could provide critical sources of information or capital. According to Weinstein and Savitz-Romer's definition of social capital, "social networks represent interpersonal ties to people committed to and capable of transmitting vital, diversified resources" (2009, p.4). Students from low-income backgrounds often lack membership in groups that hold privilege in the admissions process (e.g., legacy status, high-income families), and lack connections to people who have those vital resources (e.g., college graduates or alumni, admissions officers). For the students who were interviewed the feeling of "knowing someone important" was powerful, whether it was an influential community member

or someone in a college admissions office. The data from the parent interview also emphasized the importance of having connections to key people for her son in his college process.

Participants consistently indicated that the program was connecting them to important people who might help them. In fact, all but two interviewees mentioned developing connections to influential or important people as a part of what helps students access a college education. All participants mentioned access to these people and resources in their interviews, primarily in three categories. First, students had access to people who were influential or wealthy and thus could provide capital in the forms of connection or money. Next, students had access to admissions officers and college personnel who had valuable information regarding college. Finally, students had regular access to staff personnel who had capital in the form of specialized training or college experiences that they could share with students. All of these people helped students understand their college options, navigate the application process, and learn of scholarship opportunities. They provided capital in the form of information, influence, and opportunity simply by providing students with connections to their realms – admissions knowledge, community influence, or specialized skills.

In conclusion, students in this program were introduced to several sources of cultural and social capital that gave them connections and knowledge they would not have had otherwise. Students accessed people and information to gain feelings of confidence in their ability to connect to the world of college. They also benefitted from the connections, information, and skills provided by these people. Because of the impact on the college process these connections provided, they were perceived by all stakeholders as being an extremely important part of how the program promotes access to college. One point for reflection for practitioners is how they might help students feel they know “important” people within their programs. Perhaps

introductions to admissions deans or college presidents would be sufficient to create that feeling. However, giving students access to influential people in their community such as successful business owners, political figures, or local celebrities (e.g., sports figures, television personnel) etc.) might provide students from low-income backgrounds with a more distinct feeling that even though they are from low-income backgrounds, they still have some connections to call on when they aspire to privileges associated with higher socioeconomic groups.

Theme 4: Promoting College Readiness through Exposure to Collegiate Environments and Skills

Throughout the interviews, both student and adult stakeholders noted that students were exposed to opportunities to experience college environments and practice college skills. Being exposed to these environments and skills helped students increase their college readiness. The opportunities mentioned most frequently were exposing students to college campuses and college life and providing opportunities for students to practice behaviors and skills appropriate for the college environment such as independent living or time management. This exposure offered students cultural capital in several forms: knowledge of what college opportunities existed, knowledge of what college life would be like, and opportunities to learn and practice skills needed for success in the environment.

Parents in privileged circles have the ability to expose their students to college campuses and environments through alumni status, travel, or other means. As compared to their low-income peers, higher-income students often have access to more resources (e.g., college visits, private consultants) that students from low-income backgrounds simply cannot afford (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). As a substitute for that privilege, students in the program had the opportunity to visit colleges, both locally and out-of-state. Students indicated that they

would not have had the opportunity to make those college visits without the program. In general, traveling to out-of-state schools opened the opportunity pool for these students to find college options and perhaps to find a college opportunity that would be more cost effective for them. Students also learned to discriminate college fit. Six interviewees mentioned that students often apply to and enroll at universities they visit on the tours throughout the program. This related to one of Cabrera and La Nasa's (2001) critical tasks of having to decide where to attend college. Students in this program gained the cultural capital of knowledge of college opportunities that helped them access college more successfully.

Another form of cultural capital that student participants received was knowledge of "what college is like." Participants consistently voiced a feeling that they now understood what college life was like and had hints for mastering that life. Students spoke about the power of these experiences to shape their perceptions of their college futures. Often program participants benefited from hearing the experiences of older students or staff members in the program, and they also consistently referenced their visits to college as providing insight and understanding. Thus, students' experiences of seeing and understanding what it means to go to college and live there was transformative in how they thought about their ability to accomplish that goal. It would seem that the deeply transformative nature of these visits would encourage all advocates working with students from low-income backgrounds to provide these students with as many experiences seeing and understanding college campuses as possible.

Finally, students in the program gained the cultural capital of exposure to collegiate skills through camp, travel and project components of the program. These skills included the ability to live independently, to work and live with different kinds of people, to organize and implement projects, and to lead others. Students' perception was that by acquiring these skills through

activities such as summer camp or the Capstone project, they were prepared to get jobs, live successfully at college, work with others, and lead others. Participants in the study noted the importance of these skills, not only for success in high school, but also for students' persistence through college. The program director noted that students from the program have a 98% graduation rate from college, and attributed this astounding statistic to the practical skills of living independently and working with others. Most importantly, though, students felt equipped to take on the many tasks associated with college that do not involve academics: living in a dorm, working on group projects, finding a job, etc. These types of leadership, time management, and independent living skills could be practiced by students in many ways, but it seems this practice is imperative to creating college readiness.

Bourdieu (1986) discussed how parents in privileged circles socialize their children to behave in certain ways that set them up for academic success, even if the behaviors are not academic, thus giving them cultural capital. In keeping with this, C5 Georgia students had opportunities to learn collegiate skills throughout the program. This finding also echoed Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar's (2005) position that socialization/acclimation is one of five college-going skills students need to develop. In addition, exposure to college campuses gives students higher college aspirations by understanding what their college goal will be like and changing their fantasy goal into a reality goal (Bergin, et al., 2007).

Theme 5: Structuring Program Components Longitudinally to Produce College Qualified

Students

The final way in which stakeholders perceived that the program promoted access to college for students was through its developmental and sequential program requirements over time that helped students become more college qualified. Students, staff and parents felt that by

monitoring academics, helping students create and follow a college plan, and providing opportunities to enhance college qualifications, the program ensured that students had strong college qualifications at the end of the program. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2001), becoming college qualified is one of three critical tasks that all students must accomplish in order to reach college. This study also noted that students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to early college planning and less likely to become college qualified than their higher income peers. Therefore, the college access program in this study provided the cultural capital students from low-income backgrounds lacked to develop college qualifications and be prepared for applying to college.

This theme is related to Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar's (2003) factors that included giving students from low-income backgrounds the cultural capital of being college ready through components such as academic, college and career counseling. Their research also noted that certain structural components seem linked to success: yearlong activities, having knowledgeable and available counselors, and access to a college preparation curriculum. These structures helped students develop college qualifications in the same way that the structure of the program in this study produced students who were more college qualified.

In terms of academic qualifications for college, the college access program in this study required a minimum GPA of 2.5 for students to stay in the program. All participants felt that by having a GPA requirement, the program was able to keep track of students' performance and supply them with help where needed. Supporting academic qualification for college is the most empirically supported intervention for college access (Perna, 2005). Students came out of this program more academically qualified for college because of the program's monitoring of academic progress. Therefore, it seems that "keeping track" of students' academics and overall

well-being, and then proactively providing support in the areas where they struggled, played an instrumental role in keeping students on a positive academic path to college. This intervention supplied the cultural capital of resources and people to keep students on the college path that higher-income students have in their homes of origin or schools.

Existing literature has identified academic qualifications as the most empirically supported intervention for access (Perna, 2005), yet has not addressed in-depth how students can access these or other qualifications required in the college application process (e.g., extracurricular activities, standardized testing, essays). Findings from this study indicated that students were acquiring non-academic qualifications through participation in various components of the program. Interviewees suggested that students were helped by developing things to “put on a resume.” Therefore, students felt (and were) more qualified for college by having community service hours or other activities on their resumes. The program also provided opportunities for students to improve standardized test scores, reflect upon course selections, and perfect application components, ensuring that students were more qualified applicants than they would have been without the program. As compared to their low-income peers, higher-income students often have access to more resources such as test preparation, extracurricular opportunities, and private consultants that students from low-income backgrounds simply cannot afford (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). Thus, these program resources provided capital that gave students the opportunity to become more college qualified than they would have been without the program.

Students interviewed also felt that without the program they might not have had the specific planning or skills needed to accomplish their initial goal of college. Interviewees felt that the program had “showed them the path,” been a “foundation,” and “stepping stone” to

college by providing these specific skills. The narratives that fell under this theme indicated that the program “sets you up” for graduation, meaning that if students follow the program requirements, they are doing what they need to do to get into college. Rather than telling students what to do to get to college and expecting them to do it on their own, the program provided its students with the step-by-step incentives to accomplish each small part of the plan to college. Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) acknowledged early college planning as one of the key components in helping students become college qualified, but many students from low-income backgrounds do not have the guidance to help with that planning. One study has demonstrated that social capital in the form of counseling for college can shape college aspirations and provide informational resources that increase college enrollment (Pham & Keenan, 2011). The findings from this study showed that structuring requirements in a longitudinal fashion that meets the developmental needs of students at various stages helps students accomplish the overall goal. The findings also showed that having a sequential plan or structure for students to follow from 8th grade helped them accomplish their goal of attending college.

Implications

Implications for College Access Programs

This study recorded, summarized, and analyzed the experiences of stakeholders in a college access program and has presented the ways in which program stakeholders feel the program helps students. The findings from this study have several implications for college access programs.

The most important implication for anyone working in the field of college access is that providing sources of additional social or cultural capital to students and families from low-income backgrounds has a powerful impact. After conducting interviews with program

stakeholders in this study, the researcher understood that, from their perspectives, access to sources of social and cultural capital had a profound impact. Whether students were receiving social capital in the form of relationships or connections, or cultural capital in the form of knowledge, exposure, resilience, or skills, stakeholders perceived that receiving these types of interventions were powerful in helping students from the program access college. In addition, students in this study not only felt helped, but also felt more confident in their abilities after acquiring capital such as relationships, knowledge, and resources.

Because students from low-income backgrounds are often underserved in schools and at home and do not have access to outside resources such as private consultants, college tours, connections to alumni (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007), programs need to take on the role that is served by parents and school personnel for their higher income peers – providing *capital*. It is worth mentioning that school counseling professionals historically provided many of these forms of capital. However, in today's climate, school counseling professionals are not equipped with the time or the resources to take students on college tours, or act as a supportive presence, or take students on a ropes course, particularly those counselors from schools in low-income areas.

Advocates working toward college access for students with low-income backgrounds should learn from this study that students need a support network of peers. Perhaps some programs are working in contexts where strong, supportive peer groups on the path to college are in place; if not, programs should work to make sure students have one through the program. This idea echoes the discussion of social support groups and peer influences found in Tierney, Colwin, and Colyar's (2005) publication. Findings also indicated that students from low-income backgrounds are helped when a program bolsters the support available from their families of

origin. This idea resonates with Smith's (2008) recommendations for giving parents from low-income backgrounds tools and opportunities to help their students. After seeing such remarkable parent involvement, enthusiasm, and growth over the course of her involvement with the program, the researcher recommends that other programs should take a similar approach and invite parents to join access efforts rather than trying to substitute for them.

College access programs should also be providing students from low-income backgrounds with opportunities to develop resilience through experiential learning. In particular, the outdoor experience from this study offered a unique opportunity for students to experience challenge, and then reflect on analogous challenges while building confidence. While not many programs may be resourced to take students on a hiking trip to Wyoming, other experiences such as a ropes course or day-long hike could be incorporated that would have a similar learning objective. Having the experience of facing and overcoming new challenges in the context of a supportive environment engendered in students confidence that they could overcome a new challenge, and students in this program were given the guidance and opportunity to reflect on how that success might apply to the college process. Others seeking to increase college access for low-income students should seek to give students access to experiences that challenge then followed by opportunities to reflect on the experience of challenge.

This study also showed that providing students with connections to people who have access to social and cultural capital helps students from low-income backgrounds feel tremendously advantaged. Prior research has discussed how students from low-income backgrounds may lack connections to people who have vital resources, such as wealthy executives, college alumni, admissions officers, or membership in groups that hold privilege in the admissions process (e.g., legacy status, high-income families) (Weinstein and Savitz-Romer,

2008). The findings from this study indicate that a feeling of lacking connection to privilege is very present for students from low-income backgrounds. Introducing them to influential community members, admissions officers, and staff members with expertise helped students feel that they knew “someone important.” The findings indicated that connection to people with information (e.g., admissions officers, staff members) helped in specific ways on the path to college. Contrastingly, the findings did not indicate that any wealthy executive or celebrity had actually helped students get to college. However, when asked what helped them get to college, participants repeatedly mentioned this feeling that they knew someone important. This point is worth particular mention. It is perhaps more commonsense that college access efforts should offer students from low-income backgrounds more access to people who have information about college admissions. However, the powerful feeling from participants that knowing influential people helped them get to college, when there was not clear evidence that these people had, for example, written a letter of recommendation, or offered college advice, seems less intuitive. Having that feeling and the subsequent confidence seemed to help students feel that they had ascended to a different stratosphere in society. Other programs should be considering how they might accomplish this feeling of class ascension for students, whether by introducing them to political figures or local celebrities, in addition to giving them access to people with information about the college process.

Additionally, this study demonstrated that students from low-income backgrounds need exposure to college environments and college-level skills in order to promote college readiness. In particular, this program encouraged college readiness through exposure. By gaining “college knowledge” (Smith, 2008), visiting college campuses both in and out of state, and practicing skills they would need for college, students from this program became college ready. While no

existing literature discusses exposure to college-level environments and skills in precisely the same way, this intervention is supported by Bourdieu's (1986) discussion of socialization, Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar's (2005) discussion of socialization/acculturation as capital, Smith's (2008) discussion of "college knowledge" as social capital, and the ASHE Higher Education Report's (2007) findings that higher-income students have more opportunities for college visits. This finding could be implemented not only by college access programs, but by anyone taking an interest in college access advocacy for students from low-income backgrounds. Churches, community mentors, or access programs could all arrange for students to see college campuses and meet college students. Many people could also give students from low-income backgrounds a better understanding of what types of behaviors and skills are appropriate in collegiate environments as well as opportunities to practice those skills and behaviors.

Finally, this study showed that college access programs should be providing structures over time that help students become college qualified. This finding resonates with findings from key scholars in the field who have already discussed that becoming college qualified is a critical component of college access (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). However, this program offers an excellent model of how program requirements can be structured in a sequential, step-by-step fashion that is developmentally-appropriate to students' ages to help them become college qualified over the course of the program. Students from low-income backgrounds often lack access to college planning, especially early college planning (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna, 2005; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005), and this program gives a model of how programs can structure components over time to help students plan for college from eighth grade. In addition to helping them plan for college, this program offers a model for how monitoring academics in a context of support can help students enhance their qualifications. Again, these functions are

functions that arguably could or should be performed by school counseling professionals, but many of these students lack access to that resource. Finally, programs should supplement academic monitoring and college planning with opportunities to enhance other college qualifications. These could include test preparation resources, service opportunities, leadership experiences, or other components.

Implications for School Counseling Professionals and Other Advocates

Some researchers in the discipline of school counseling have already demonstrated curiosity regarding how school counselors might deliver additional *capital* to students. However, this study proves that school counseling professionals should continue not only to explore this issue with curiosity, but to understand what a critical need it is for students from low-income backgrounds to access as much *capital* as possible on the journey to college. School counselors should look for ways to deliver social and cultural capital to students from low-income backgrounds as a means of increasing their access to higher education. These means could include exposure to college campuses, introductions to other people, or even becoming a part of a student's support network. Interestingly enough, some of these suggested forms of capital already appear in best practices of the American School Counselors Association (2014). In particular, the student standards from ASCA are built around three domains – academic, career, and personal/social. It would seem several of the findings from this study fall into those domains.

The researcher would argue that sufficient access to professional school counselors is in itself a form of capital. For a student, access to a professional school counselor means access to information, support, and skills. Theoretically, school counselors provide some of the interventions discussed in this study, including being part of a support network, providing

students with access to connections in admissions and the community, and helping students process difficult experiences in a way that builds resilience, and helping students plan to become college qualified. Therefore, advocates for increasing college access for students from low-income backgrounds should also be advocating for these students to gain sufficient access to excellent school counseling professionals.

This study offers some guidance for school counselors and community advocates in how they might support parents from low-income backgrounds. Using a critical paradigm, advocates can take the stance that parents from low-income backgrounds want to provide support for their children to get to college, but may not know how to do so. Advocates should be giving parents information, support, education, exposure, and help with college planning so that their students can become college ready and college qualified.

Implications for Public Policy

This study leaves no doubt that students from low-income backgrounds need access to additional capital in order to create an equitable path to college for them; and an equitable path to college for all students will dictate the future health of the United States. Scholars have written about how the society in which individuals live, work and play reaps the benefits of higher education. These benefits include economic growth, greater civic participation, less prejudice, reduced crime, and reduced disease and unemployment (Baum et al., 2010; Foster, 2002; Mudge & Higgins, 2011; Parrish, 2004). In addition, higher levels of education correspond to lower unemployment rates; thus, increased individual levels of postsecondary education decrease individuals' dependence on the government for financial support and social welfare programs (Baum et al., 2010; Mudge & Higgins, 2011).

Therefore, policymakers should consider how to best allocate funds in ways that provide students from low-income backgrounds with further capital. Public policymakers might consider the fact that if access to professional school counseling was sufficient for students from low-income backgrounds, college access programs might not be necessary. Policymakers might also consider that the delivery of capital to students from low-income backgrounds has a profound impact on their perception of whether or not they can go to college. In American society, if young people from low-income backgrounds feel they have the tools, connections, and support needed to break the generational cycle of poverty, attend college, and make a better life for themselves, then all Americans will benefit. Regardless of whether school counselors or community organizations deliver these opportunities, the delivery of social and cultural capital is of incredible importance in rectifying the inequities that currently exist in access to higher education.

Limitations

Several possible limitations existed in this study. It is important to discuss these limitations. One possible limitation of the study was that of the seven students interviewed, only three of them were twelfth grade students. The students who were not in twelfth grade were not able to speak from their own experiences of the later programmatic elements such as the college tour or capstone summit, and were only able to speak about their perceptions of those experiences as they had heard about them. Perhaps it would have been preferable to interview only twelfth grade students, but the researcher made the decision to include the perspectives of students from all years of the program because she valued a comprehensive view of the case.

Another limitation that existed was the student sample. The program director sent out multiple emails initially, but when a lack of response became apparent, he suggested that we

begin the research with a few of the student Ambassadors who worked in the offices. By choosing to interview four Ambassadors out of the seven interviews, the researcher narrowed the scope of the type of students who would participate in interviews. It is likely that Ambassadors were the type of students who were more motivated and involved in the program. Similarly, it is possible that the study missed a critical perspective - that of a student who was not successful in the program. However, due to the difficulty of recruiting participants who were not connected to the program, the study did not include that perspective. The additional student interviews were conducted with twelfth grade students who were in attendance at a required program. The researcher literally recruited the first three students she met when she walked into the program, so the random selection of these students may mitigate this limiting factor.

Another limitation existed in the area of adult stakeholder interviews. Only one parent was interviewed for this study. In spite of the fact that the researcher made intensive efforts to find another parent interview, no further parents made themselves available to be interviewed for the study. Additionally, the program itself offered a source of limitation. By offering such a wealth of resources, the researcher had some difficulty in understanding to what extent the level of resources (e.g., connections, funding, personnel) affected the outcome of the study.

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher had to be aware that researcher bias could play into the interpretation of results. In order to mitigate this limiting factor, the researcher used two peer reviewers who read transcriptions and evaluated the categories and themes evaluated. The results are also reported with a rich, thick description in the participants' original words in order to maintain integrity of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore how the stakeholders in a college access program perceive that the program is promoting access to college for students from low-income backgrounds. Too little direction existed in prior research to narrow the focus of factors promoting access in this study. Instead, the researcher took an exploratory stance, informed by a lens of social and cultural capital theories. She designed a qualitative case study approach in order to hear the experiences of people actually involved in a college access program.

Much is at stake as scholars seek to understand how best to rectify the inequities that exist in access to higher education. One purpose of this study was to conduct an exploration that provided future avenues to pursue in this quest. To that end, this study added to the literature that explores themes that are helping students in college access interventions.

However, more quantitative data are needed to understand to what extent these factors are promoting access. This data should include rigorous evaluation of various program components and their level of impact. Gullat and Jan (2003) referenced the need for rigorous program evaluation. Though we have recommendations of what these programs should contain, “whether the programs work is another question entirely – one that has little empirical evidence” (Myers et al., 2010, p. 301). These types of data are needed to inform decisions of public policy and funding, and to support advocacy and development of existing programs. Because college access programs can play such a critical role in increasing college enrollment for underrepresented groups and ensuring equitable educational access for all groups in the United States, it is important that advocates in this field understand what interventions are functioning to promote college access in order to create policy and programmatic interventions that use time, resources, and funding wisely.

In a review of the literature, it is clear that a “best practices” standard does not exist for college access programs. Upon investigating the literature on college access, it becomes quickly apparent that every scholar writing on the topic develops a different set of themes or structures that inform what could make an “ideal” college access program. Many of these scholars write in a variety of academic disciplines and use different theoretical lenses. Collaboration among scholars is needed to develop a clearer understanding of what works and what does not work when it comes to college access for students from low-income backgrounds. Future research should focus on developing a clear set of standards by which future programs could operate and current programs could modify and develop. Ideally, these standards would result in certification or supervision of these programs to ensure the ethics of promising college access to students who need it and perhaps not delivering it.

After conducting this study, the researcher would also suggest that future scholars look at programs with fewer resources to see if factors such as connecting to critical networks or offering students exposure through travel to colleges have an impact when opportunities are more limited. So, would meeting the mayor of a small town have as strong of an impact on students as meeting the CEO of Coca-Cola or getting a free iPad from an Apple executive? Would traveling to a neighboring state have as much impact as traveling to China? Would going on a hike one hour away have the same impact as flying to hike in Wyoming? It is worth understanding whether the level of intervention makes a difference, or whether the general theme is important.

Finally, the researcher would suggest that further research focus on various forms of social and cultural capital in comparison for how important each form might be. For example, how much impact does exposure to college environments and skills have as compared to helping

students become college qualified over time? Alternatively, having a support network may be the most important intervention of all. Some type of quantitative study helping scholars to understand the impact of various modalities of delivering capital would add a great deal of insight to the existing literature.

Personal Reflection

This interest of mine began long ago when I was working my first year after college in the undergraduate admissions office at Vanderbilt. At that time, my supervisor spent a great deal of time helping me to discern how to evaluate students who might appear to be less academically qualified, but who had made the most of less opportunity and would continue to make the most of the opportunity to attend Vanderbilt. During that same time, I also acted as a representative of the university to many of the rural and low-income areas in Middle Tennessee, where our office had not typically visited to recruit students in the past. I came to believe that my presence with a Vanderbilt banner at a rural College Day gave students valuable, often unavailable, information and provided them with access to an “important” person.

My interest in helping young people get to college evolved into a passion, and my studies at Teachers College, Columbia University handed me a social justice lens through which to view that interest. In my time as an intern at Frederick Douglass Academy in Harlem, New York, many students and two dedicated college counselors were gracious enough to share with me their experiences, and to help me grow into a practicing school counselor.

My subsequent path took me to incredibly diverse communities – in a boarding school and in a private international school, where I acted as a counselor helping young people apply to and choose colleges. Throughout those years, I have worked with a variety of students and enjoyed my experiences. When possible, I have joined college access efforts both regionally and

nationally as a volunteer, accessing my well-resourced position of professional development and connection to give back to other communities. My experiences as a counselor for students from low-income backgrounds at the weeklong Camp College Program through the Public Education Foundation of Chattanooga were followed closely by becoming chairperson of the first annual SACAC Atlanta Mini-Camp College and becoming a regular volunteer for C5 Georgia and other outreach efforts.

Now, as a school counselor with over ten years' experience working with young people, a high level of involvement in professional organizations, and expertise in issues regarding college admissions and access, I feel I have made another step in my journey with this study. It truly is the accomplishment of a lifetime to conduct a study that brings some small amount of insight into helping interventions about which I care passionately, and to go forward from this research as an advocate and a scholar.

Surprisingly perhaps to my cohort or my family, but most of all myself, the process of conducting and completing my study and writing this dissertation has brought alive in me a passion to continue to research, write, and advocate in this field. I hope that through my past, current, and future efforts, more young people will find the path to college, and society will benefit from the rewards of increased equity among its citizens.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how stakeholders in a college access program for students from low-income backgrounds perceive that the program is promoting access to college. Because this study operated from an ontology of critical theory, the results of this study should be used to think critically about the current paradigms of society and attempt to correct its existing inequities.

This study interviewed fourteen student and adult stakeholders from C5 Georgia, a program working to promote college access, and found that they perceived students were being helped by receiving various forms of social and cultural capital. This capital was delivered in five ways. First, the program created a supportive network for students that helped facilitate their success. Additionally, the program also helped students build resilience through experiential learning and provided students with connections to people with information, influence, or wealth. Finally, the program produced students who were college-ready and college-qualified. Thus, the findings from this study suggested that any entities working toward increased college access for students from low-income backgrounds should think about how their efforts are providing those students with these types of capital.

Most importantly, the findings from this study show that students and parents from low-income backgrounds felt that they could have an opportunity for a better life, a college education – a feeling they did not have before receiving these interventions. All advocates for low-income students can take the findings from this study and first know that these types of interventions can make a difference in the lives and hearts of young people. Advocates should also take these findings and use them to advocate. Whether communities advocate for additional school counseling support or community-based organizations reach out to influential community members or local universities for connections, these results can help all advocates refine their efforts to give students from low-income backgrounds a better chance of getting to college.

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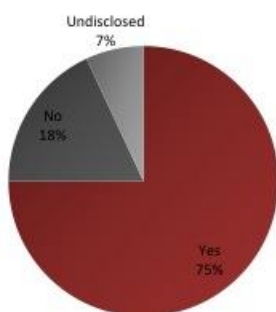
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APPENDIX A

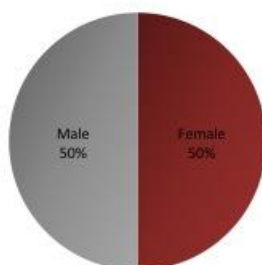
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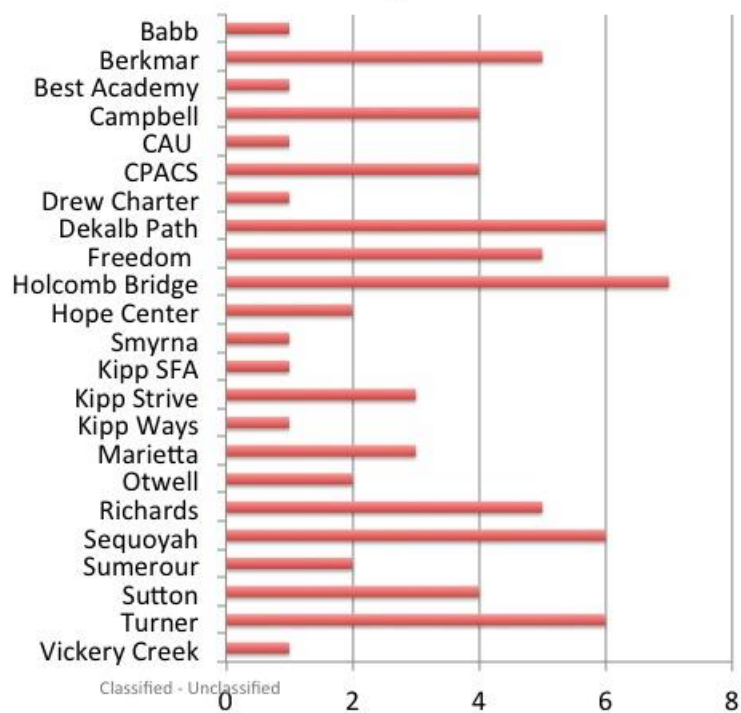
First Generation Scholar



Gender

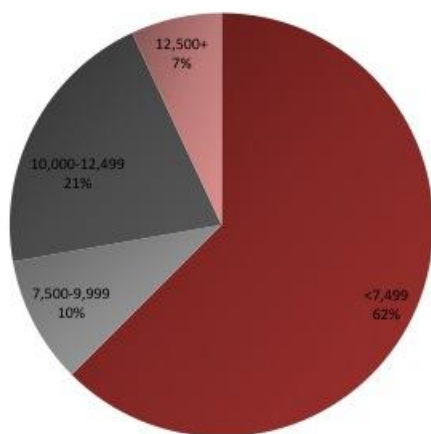


Students by Partner

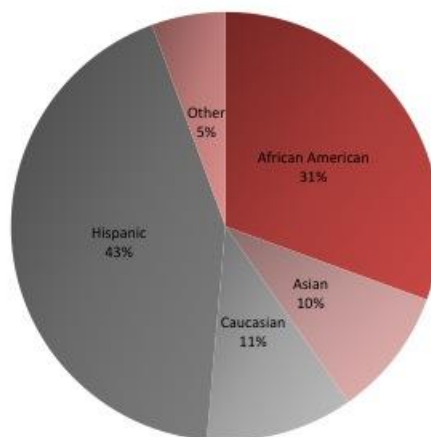




Income Level per Household Member



Ethnicity



Classified - Unclassified

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM
UNDERSTANDING A COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF C5
GEORGIA

Researcher's Statement

I am asking your child to take part in a research study. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to allow your child to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want your child to be in the study or not. A copy of this form will be given to you, and I will keep a copy for my records.

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Rosemary Phelps

Counseling and Student Personnel Services

rephelps@uga.edu, (706) 542-4221

Student Co-Investigator: Nicole S. Cook

Counseling and Student Personnel Services

ncook@uga.edu, (404) 558-9793

Purpose of the Study

This study will help people working in college access efforts to understand the experiences of students, parents, and counselors who are participating in C5 Georgia. By studying C5 Georgia, we hope to understand how to better help more students get to college.

Study Procedures

If you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to ...

- Complete a demographic questionnaire
- Participate in a face-to-face or phone interview with the researcher Nicole Cook for approximately 60 minutes.
- Discuss in detail his/her experiences with the C5 Program during the interview. Some questions may be personal in nature such as “How has the C5 Program affected your family?”
- Allow his/her interview to be audio recorded.

Risks and discomforts

- We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

- Individuals who take part in this study are given an opportunity to discuss their experience and add to the understanding of this college access program.
- This study benefits programs working to get underrepresented students to college by providing a case study for analysis.

Incentives for participation

Individuals who take part in this study will receive a \$10.00 iTunes gift card.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used to record each interview. Upon completion of the interview, each audio recording will be transcribed to a written document in order for the data to be analyzed from all interviews. Participants will each be given an opportunity to check interview transcriptions for accuracy. The audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data collected be labeled with a code of initial (such as NS) and the researchers will be the only ones who have access to the key to the code which links your child's research data to his/her name and contact information. The researchers will remove all identifiers/the key to the code from the research record after all data collection has been completed. The results of this study may be published, but your child's name or any other information that could be used to identify your child will not be used. All information that can be identified as your child's will be held confidential. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written permission unless required by law. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Taking part is voluntary

Your child's involvement in the study is voluntary, and your child may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified will be kept

as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your decision whether or not to allow your child participate in the study will not influence any services provided by C5 Program or his/her relationships with the program staff.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Nicole S. Cook, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Rosemary Phelps. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Nicole Cook at ncook@uga.edu or at (404) 558-9793. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Parental Consent to Participate in Research: To voluntarily allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire Parental Permission Form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Signature: _____

Date _____

Your Printed Name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher: _____

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Assent Form for Participation in Research
Understanding a College Access Program: A Case Study of the C5 Georgia Program

We are doing a research study to understand how college access programs help students get to college. We are asking you to be in the study because you are currently participating in the C5 Georgia Program. If you agree to be in the study, you will participate in an interview with the researcher that will last approximately one hour. During this interview, you will talk to the researcher about your experiences in the C5 Georgia Program. Being in this study will help us learn about how to help more students get to college in the future. You will also receive a \$10.00 iTunes gift card.

You do not have to say “yes” if you don’t want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say “no” now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent’s permission to do this. Even if your parent says “yes,” you can still say “no.” Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say “yes” or “no.”

Any information we gather that can be linked to you will be stored safely and will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisors. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project. We will only use a code so that other people cannot tell who you are.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can contact me at (404) 558-9793 or ncook@uga.edu or contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Rosemary Phelps at rephelpsuga.edu or (706) 542-4221.

Name of Child: _____ Parental Permission on File: ☐ Yes ☐

No

(For Written Assent) Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.

Signature of Child: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM

UNDERSTANDING A COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF C5 GEORGIA

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. A copy of this form will be given to you, and I will keep a copy for my records.

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- Complete a demographic questionnaire
- Participate in a face-to-face or phone interview with researcher Nicole Cook for approximately 60 minutes.
- Discuss in detail your personal and/or professional experiences with the C5 Program during the interview.
- Allow your interview to be audio recorded.

Risks and discomforts

- We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

- Individuals who take part in this study are given an opportunity to discuss their experience and add to the understanding of this college access program.
- This study benefits programs working to get underrepresented students to college by providing a case study for analysis.

Incentives for participation

Individuals who participate will receive a \$10.00 iTunes gift card.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used to record each interview. Upon completion of the interview, each audio recording will be transcribed to a written document in order for the data to be analyzed from all interviews. Participants will each be given an opportunity to check

interview transcriptions for accuracy. The audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data collected be labeled with a code of initial (such as NS) and the researchers will be the only ones who have access to the key to the code which links your research data to your name and contact information. The researchers will remove all identifiers/the key to the code from the research record after all data collection has been completed. The results of this study may be published, but your name or any other information that could be used to identify you will not be used. All information that can be identified as yours will be held confidential. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your decision whether or not to participate in the study will not influence any services provided by C5 Program or your relationship with the program staff.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Nicole S. Cook, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Rosemary Phelps. Please ask any questions you have now.

If you have questions later, you may contact Nicole Cook at ncook@uga.edu or at (404) 558-9793. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol for Student Participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Please know that you are free to withdraw at any time as your participation is voluntary. If you decide to withdraw or stop this interview, you can still participate in the C5 Georgia program without any penalty. I will be making an audio tape recording of our interview with your permission. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How did you get involved in the C5 Georgia program.
 - a. How did you learn about the program?
2. Which activities in the C5 Georgia program do you feel have been meaningful to you in the goal of getting to college? In what ways?
3. Which C5 program activities have do you feel have not been meaningful to you in the goal of getting to college?
4. In what way (if any) has your family been involved in the C5 Georgia program?
5. In what way (if any) has the C5 Georgia program changed your expectations of going to college?
6. In what way (if any) has C5 Georgia helped you become more academically qualified for college? Follow-up question: What are some examples.
7. In what way (if any) has participating in C5 increased your chance of graduating from high school? Of applying to college?
8. What (if any) college information or resources has C5 provided that you wouldn't have had access to otherwise?
9. What is your perception of the summer camp experience in regards to preparing you for college?
10. What is your perception of the college tour in regards to preparing you for college?
11. What is your perception of the ACT NOW Summit in regards to preparing you for college?
12. What aspects of the program were not as helpful in preparing you for college?
13. What did you feel was meaningful about the program in 8th grade? 9th grade? 10th grade? 11th grade? 12th grade?
14. Is there anything I haven't asked you that is important for you to share with me or important for me to know?

Interview Protocol for Adult, Non-Parent Stakeholders:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Please know that you are free to withdraw at any time as your participation is voluntary. If you decide to withdraw or stop this interview, you can still participate in the C5 Georgia program without any penalty. I will be making an audio tape recording of our interview with your permission. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How did you learn about the C5 Georgia program?
2. What has been your role or involvement in the program?
3. Which activities in the C5 program do you feel have helped students most with the goal of getting to college?
4. How (if at all) does the C5 Georgia Program change students' expectations of going to college?
5. How (if at all) does the C5 Georgia prepare students academically to go to college?
6. How (if at all) has C5 increased students' chances of graduating from high school? Of applying to college?
7. What (if any) college information or resources have you or your students used from C5 that you wouldn't have had otherwise?
8. What is your perception of the summer camp experience in regards to preparing students for college?
9. What is your perception of the college tour in regards to preparing students for college?
10. What is your perception of the ACT NOW Summit in regards to preparing students for college?
11. What aspects of the program were not as helpful in preparing students for college?
12. What did you feel was meaningful about the program in 8th grade? 9th grade? 10th grade? 11th grade? 12th grade?
13. What would you say is the most meaningful way that C5 Georgia affects students?
14. Is there anything I haven't asked you that is important for you to share with me or important for me to know?

Interview Protocol for Parents of Participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Please know that you are free to withdraw at any time as your participation is voluntary. If you decide to withdraw or stop this interview, you can still participate in the C5 Georgia program without any penalty. I will be making an audio tape recording of our interview with your permission. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How did you learn about the C5 Georgia program?
2. How have you been personally involved in the program?
3. Which activities in the C5 program do you feel have helped your student most with the goal of getting to college?
4. How (if at all) has the C5 Georgia Program changed your student's expectations of going to college?
5. How (if at all) has the C5 Georgia prepared your student academically to go to college?
6. How (if at all) has C5 increased your student's chances of graduating from high school? Of applying to college?
7. What (if any) college information or resources have you or your student used from C5 that you wouldn't have used otherwise?
8. What is your perception of the summer camp experience in regards to preparing your student for college?
9. What is your perception of the college tour in regards to preparing your student for college?
10. What is your perception of the ACT NOW Summit in regards to preparing your student for college?
11. What aspects of the program were not as helpful in preparing your student for college?
12. What did you feel was meaningful for your student about the program in 8th grade? 9th grade? 10th grade? 11th grade? 12th grade?
13. What would you say is the most meaningful way that C5 Georgia affects students?
14. What would you say is the most meaningful way that C5 Georgia affects families?
15. How (if at all) has C5 Georgia helped you support your student in going to college?
16. Is there anything I haven't asked you that is important for you to share with me or important for me to know?

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPTION AGREEMENT

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

I, Jennifer Tall, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio recordings and documentation received from Nicole Shaub Cook; The University of Georgia, Counseling and Student Personnel Services, related to material as noted: A case study of C5 Georgia: Understanding a College Access Program for Low Income Students. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Nicole Shaub Cook;
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audio recordings and study-related documents to Nicole Shaub Cook in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive, online storage spaces, and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Jennifer Tall

Transcriber's Signature _____

DocuSigned by:
J. Tall
851F235265384AF...

Date January 20, 2014

APPENDIX E

MEMBER CHECK SUMMARY EXAMPLE

Interview 3

In this interview, the interviewee discussed the following points as being important when thinking about program and how it promotes access to college:

- This student got involved in the program because an older sister was previously involved
- This student is an Ambassador leader for the class
- The programming prepares students for big things – SAT, ACT, college, etc.
- This student feels that the students in the program are a real family, and have helped him more than his actual family with his goals.
- None of the activities in the program are wasted or meaningless use of time.
- Some of the program activities also help parents have access to information or people they wouldn't have otherwise. His parents regularly volunteer at program activities.
- The program really “shows you what college is like” and helps you “get a feeling of it”. Though the student started the program knowing he wanted to go to college, the program helped him have a better understanding of what college is, and what he wants to do.
- The program shows you the path to things like better SAT scores
- The student felt he had access to college information on the program website that he could not have gotten elsewhere or wouldn't have had otherwise.
- The summer experience teaches students to lead themselves and then lead others. These experiences give you the skills to be a better person and then in the activities and in life/college, you apply those skills
- The college tour gives students a better feeling of what college life is like and helps you set goals and understand how to get to those goals.
- The summit experience provides networking opportunities so you can meet government officials and other people.
- The years throughout the program build on each other, and each year helps you face the next challenges. You use those skills to get to college, and also to help younger students learn.
- The times when all students gather are the most meaningful because students get to share experiences.

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CODE BOOK

Interview 10	Student FN – Member Check Sent
Code	Quote and page
Initial motivation	As ... it's ... I don't know ... like even before C5, I was just like out there and like I've always been on my own in a way. ²
Program as family	<p>And they were just like be part of the family. And it's ... it's helped me a lot, it really has, and I don't know how to word it, though.²</p> <p>So like the first ... the second day of ... in Wyoming I hurt myself.</p> <p>And I fell and I like I couldn't walk for like a day.</p> <p>Yeah, and like ... I don't know before at C5, I feel like if I would have just ... I would have fell ... like fallen and just not being able to work, I probably just would have gone home.</p> <p>But then like everyone from C5, they were like, they came to me to help me. And like the actual day where we actually started like going hiking, I had my bag and then like everyone just like give me some of your stuff, you know, so it's like ... you backslide on me, like slide on you, and it's just like C5 just helps you grow as a person and as a community. Because like to be honest, I like oh, this ... the students, I see them as my family. we've been five years together⁶</p> <p>Like yeah, like because I used to be like a C average student. And then they told us, they were like if you need help at school, we're here for you. You know, we're students, too. We have students and this is your family, you know, and after a while, you know, I started going ... reaching out to like counselors, or my students, and we just help each other. And just ... Ninth grade, I was failing lit, my first semester, and I was just like I'm not going to pass this. And I reached out and I started like C5 like I reached out to them, if they could help me, like not ... not like I didn't ask them to like oh, hey, you come here, you know. But like they found me someone close to me and just tried to like find someone that could help me. But ... We basically, it was like a tutor, like he just helped me through my classes. 13</p>
Service	And I started helping. We started doing lots of like events. We started ... we went to this Atlanta place and we went to this Pathway and like we basically tried to like redo the whole park. And like we fixed it, we added flowers, we moved like stuff and what-not. ⁴
Hand on learning	Yeah, I really do, because like I'm more of a like hands-on kind of person. 4
Challenge	And we go out there and basically try to lead ourselves. Because we do have a guide, but it's on us, we have our ... we have to be in charge of the mapping. We have to be in charge of everything, food and everything, so we have to ... we like know how to organize and work together. So basically we just ... I don't know, I guess, leading yourself is like just be strong and be capable, of going through and leading others, just working together, throughout the camp or the Wyoming thing. ⁵
Competency	And we go out there and basically try to lead ourselves. Because we do have a guide, but it's on us, we have our ... we have to be in charge of the mapping. We have to be in charge of everything, food and everything, so we have to ... we like know how to organize and work together. So basically we just ... I don't know, I guess, leading

	yourself is like just be strong and be capable, of going through and leading others, just working together, throughout the camp or the Wyoming thing. ⁵
Teamwork	And we go out there and basically try to lead ourselves. Because we do have a guide, but it's on us, we have our ... we have to be in charge of the mapping. We have to be in charge of everything, food and everything, so we have to ... we like know how to organize and work together. So basically we just ... I don't know, I guess, leading yourself is like just be strong and be capable, of going through and leading others, just working together, throughout the camp or the Wyoming thing. ⁵
Travel	
Hike as challenge	So like the first ... the second day of ... in Wyoming I hurt myself. And I fell and I like I couldn't walk for like a day. Yeah, and like ... I don't know before at C5, I feel like if I would have just ... I would have fell ... like fallen and just not being able to work, I probably just would have gone home. But then like everyone from C5, they were like, they came to me to help me. And like the actual day where we actually started like going hiking, I had my bag and then like everyone just like give me some of your stuff, you know, so it's like ... you backslide on me, like slide on you, and it's just like C5 just helps you grow as a person and as a community. Because like to be honest, I like oh, this ... the students, I see them as my family. we've been five years together ⁶
Parent involvement	(p. 7 talked about how program brought him and his dad closer) he volunteers, etc. 8 encouraging sister to join 9
Networking	Yeah, Stephanie, I think. She was talking about how there's like people coming to our graduation lunch and it's always been like that, there's always people from different companies that you meet and it's just ... I don't know, you just meet new people. So like I met this guy from Apple and he basically told me about how the whole Apple system works and I went to the one by Atlanta. There's this thing and he works there. And I actually did stay in contact with him and he even gave me a free iPad. So which was like nice. 9 Or just Pathways, you know, sponsors that come here, sometimes, and they view the Pathways and stuff. And like right now, like interviews and you get to know them, stay in contact with them. And just it starts from there. ¹⁰
Wasn't sure about college before	¹⁰
Exp. to opportunities	And I don't know, it just ... it has taught me that ... I don't know, school is everything, I feel, like now. Because before, I was just like, oh, I don't know after high school, I don't know and like just the expectations that they have and the way they talk to you and it's just ... like I don't know, it just opens your mind to new things ¹⁰ And they just like opened my mind, too, like different perspectives and different colleges. ¹⁷ It just brought me new knowledge, to different schools. And I applied to Utah State, which I would have never done before. I didn't even think about it. ²¹
Raised expect for college	I wasn't sure if I would be able to go. I ... I want to go to college. I want to finish high school and I don't know, I want to be someone in life. ¹¹
Peer influence	Like in a way, they just ... they basically help you grow. They give you like ... you know, you hang out with the wrong crowd and the good crowd, and like they're just ... they're the good crowd, I guess, they tell you do good in school, send me your report card every month or every other month. Make sure to call me. And if you need help at school, they do help you. Like if you need a tutor or something, like or something, you can call C5 and they will come and help you, if you need help. Like they're there through the whole process of high school. ¹¹ Yeah, because at first, I was just hanging like with the wrong crowd.

	<p>Like football players, we go out, party and what-not. And I ... eventually after C5, after like a few years, two or three years, I was just like ... I don't think I should just be like taking school so light.¹²</p> <p>because like you're at camp and you're like outside of the world. And you're in the like little community and like you're just like being influenced by like goodness, you know.¹⁵</p>
Academic monitoring	<p>Like in a way, they just ... they basically help you grow. They give you like ... you know, you hang out with the wrong crowd and the good crowd, and like they're just ... they're the good crowd, I guess, they tell you do good in school, send me your report card every month or every other month. Make sure to call me. And if you need help at school, they do help you. Like if you need a tutor or something, like or something, you can call C5 and they will come and help you, if you need help. Like they're there through the whole process of high school. ¹¹</p> <p>Like yeah, like because I used to be like a C average student. And then they told us, they were like if you need help at school, we're here for you. You know, we're students, too. We have students and this is your family, you know, and after a while, you know, I started going ... reaching out to like counselors, or my students, and we just help each other. And just ... Ninth grade, I was failing lit, my first semester, and I was just like I'm not going to pass this. And I reached out and I started like C5 like I reached out to them, if they could help me, like not ... not like I didn't ask them to like oh, hey, you come here, you know. But like they found me someone close to me and just tried to like find someone that could help me. But ... We basically, it was like a tutor, like he just helped me through my classes. ¹³</p>
Access to resources/support	<p>Like in a way, they just ... they basically help you grow. They give you like ... you know, you hang out with the wrong crowd and the good crowd, and like they're just ... they're the good crowd, I guess, they tell you do good in school, send me your report card every month or every other month. Make sure to call me. And if you need help at school, they do help you. Like if you need a tutor or something, like or something, you can call C5 and they will come and help you, if you need help. Like they're there through the whole process of high school. ¹¹</p> <p>Like yeah, like because I used to be like a C average student. And then they told us, they were like if you need help at school, we're here for you. You know, we're students, too. We have students and this is your family, you know, and after a while, you know, I started going ... reaching out to like counselors, or my students, and we just help each other. And just ... Ninth grade, I was failing lit, my first semester, and I was just like I'm not going to pass this. And I reached out and I started like C5 like I reached out to them, if they could help me, like not ... not like I didn't ask them to like oh, hey, you come here, you know. But like they found me someone close to me and just tried to like find someone that could help me. But ... We basically, it was like a tutor, like he just helped me through my classes. ¹³</p>
Connex to staff	<p>Because I was just like, school, go out and just have like ... go out ... like friends, hang out. And like the way like my counselor, Joel, he was like my Flint year and then like he's decided to stay through like four years. And he's been my counselor for like the whole ... C5 experience. And even today, we still stay in contact and he's ... he's helped me.</p> <p>Like ... because like he ... like the counselors, they are students themselves. So they know ... they ... they're still like our age and they know and ... they what's the hard work, which they have to do to get into college.</p>

	And they just help you develop into like the right state of mind, in which you should go into college. 12
Qualifications	Like more academically qualified? Well, C5 is like a great program, I feel, like it just ... it brings you new opportunities, not like if ... if it's not directly with C5, they find it like a different organization or a different like program, which helps you to college. Like it looks, I feel like it looks good in colleges, that you were in a leadership camp. And it just ... I don't know, it looks ... I feel like it looks good. 12
Support/potential	Like before, I was just ... like I said, like I wasn't sure, I wasn't like ... I was kind of lost, and I just like ... I ... I knew I liked doing good stuff, I like helping, but with academics-wise, I wasn't like ... I was kind of lost. And they just helped me like stay in school, helped me like reach my potential. 16
Travel to out of state college	16 Because I ... we went to Florida and Georgia and like different colleges, which I probably would have never even thought about. Like I really like the film school, of FAMU.17
Self motivation	17
Access to information	and like reach out to them, you know. Like you just, like hey, you know, can you help me or like can you give me some information. And they do like, on a regular basis, we have a Facebook page and they do like put scholarships, in which we can check out. So basically, they ... they give us information but it is on us to put our effort, too. 17 Scholarship info 18
Independence/self efficacy	I feel like it's ... I feel like it is the key of like the whole program, because going into camp, it just puts you in a whole another state of mind, which is just like they teach you how to like ... depend on yourself. 19 20
Connections to new people	Depend like on like ... I don't know, like it just ... I don't know ... like, I don't know, sorry. Like going to camp is just like a ... like a whole new experience. Like you meet new people, meet people from college, and like my counselor, he goes to UGA. And he's like ... he basically showed me like stuff about like UGA, like even though I don't want to go to UGA, but like still like it helped me like grab new knowledge from there. 19
What is college like	Like going to camp is just like a ... like a whole new experience. Like you meet new people, meet people from college, and like my counselor, he goes to UGA. And he's like ... he basically showed me like stuff about like UGA, like even though I don't want to go to UGA, but like still like it helped me like grab new knowledge from there. 19
Social Norms	And before I like I ... I ignored them and like now like C5, they taught me how to like communicate with those people in college fairs, like know how to ask the right questions, and like they teach you like basically how to like get the correct information.20
Skills for getting info	And before I like I ... I ignored them and like now like C5, they taught me how to like communicate with those people in college fairs, like know how to ask the right questions, and like they teach you like basically how to like get the correct information.20 21- teach you how to use correct information and find the correct school for you.
Critical network	It just, because just meeting people, I guess. We would meet the...not the dean, but the head people from their colleges. Yeah, like the actual like important people, I guess. 21 So if we were like have one-on-one conversations, and like students from these ... those specific schools, we would talk to them, and we would have like programs which dealt with applying to their school.22

Hearing college experiences	Like ... like FAMU, I would speak to a graduate or a kid that's doing filming and like I would like have a one-on-one conversation with them and be like so what do I have to do in high school, so I can be okay in college?22
Applying learned skills	I feel like I'm capable of leading others. And they teach you how to do that. They teach you how to like share the knowledge that you've gained the first year. And the third year, we just ... we put it on tests. We actually ... they tested us, if we really did learn the second year. And we go out there, we work together and just lead your group, because everyone, throughout this week, every student will be the leader of that day24
Confidence	... it helps you like grow confidence on yourself, that you know you can do things, you know you can like ... if we can like go out to like Centennial Park and that's like hundreds of people to do the survey, like you know you can do something, you know you're capable of doing stuff, which like going to college and applying and meeting ... going to the actual colleges and talking to people, it just builds your confidence. 23 I feel like I'm capable of leading others. And they teach you how to do that. They teach you how to like share the knowledge that you've gained the first year. And the third year, we just ... we put it on tests. We actually ... they tested us, if we really did learn the second year. And we go out there, we work together and just lead your group, because everyone, throughout this week, every student will be the leader of that day24
Character Growth	I feel like C5 is a key, like okay, for like situations in which a student or someone is like in problems or like education-wise, or like something, C5 is the perfect way to like take someone or something out of a bad situation. Like if a kid is struggling or something, I feel like if that kid joins C5, I feel like his whole perspective and everything would change. Like I feel like C5 helps you grow as a person, which without it, I feel like me, myself, I would be someone else. I would ... I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't before like doing community service. I ... I wouldn't be helping at church, I wouldn't be just doing things that I do now. They just help you change as a person, to a better person. 25

APPENDIX G

MASTER CODE BOOK

Behavioral norms	1, 3, 9, 10, 7, 5, 11, 14	<p>Like it's okay to play around, but you need to act at a certain level and like be at a certain professional level, to learn how to like...dressing and stuff (13)</p> <p>Like you can make it fun and games, but you have to be serious about it...like okay, how to act in this type of world...if someone is giving you a presentation about a new business they want to open, you can't just sit there and laugh at it. Like you have to like be in a professional level and be like, okay, like handshakes, like just even the smallest detail, like firm handshake or posture and stuff, so it teaches you those skills(14) FW</p> <p>So, if the coach says this, then it means this 13EW</p> <p>Oh, my mother ... she's always like, hey, get up, it's ... it's seven, you need to be there on time or oh, don't ... you need to go change, you look awful. You can't go in there looking like that. This is a ... a ... a program of prestige, you can't wear denim5</p> <p>Yes. So like for example, right now, if I were to be sitting here with my hand under my chin, you'd probably get the impression that I'm bored or that I'm disinterested or something like that. Like there, they always emphasize about how you need to watch how you're standing or how you do hand gestures, or even when you're interacting with your parents or your friends or higher officials, because I ... it really can ... even though you don't say it, you can say it with your body15DV</p> <p>And before I like I ... I ignored them and like now like C5, they taught me how to like communicate with those people in college fairs, like know how to ask the right questions, and like they teach you like basically how to like get the correct information.20 FN</p> <p>How to dress – 13</p> <p>This is going to be okay. I think most kids drop out because of situations non-academic. I think they're just...you know, they just...nobody likes me here, I don't like it here, I don't seem to fit in here. ...whatever their issue is, it seems so that they get to practice some of that 19KD</p> <p>And then they got out and they represent C5 with the Confucius Institute from Kennesaw. So you know it's not only how they present themselves to us, but it's how they present themselves to Kennesaw University. 9 TF</p> <p>18 Things like being able to respect people's space, and being able to be open to hear about people's struggles. It's all of that is established very, very early at camp and then carried through. So a student knows that if they came to me in the fourth year, we're going on a college tour, the expectations that they had at camp are the same, you know, the expectations they had in Wyoming are the same, so, you don't come, you know, and we don't do electronics, you know. We don't do all of these type of things. There are certain language that's used. And so, the wording and the language that's used at camp is consistent on the college tour and the Act Now Summit and we do that because we want the students to understand how strong the culture is FN</p>
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