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Exploring College Readiness: Self-Perceptions of Early College Students

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This dissertation, EXPLORING COLLEGE READINESS: SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY COLLEGE STUDENTS, by KIM R. RAMSEY-WHITE, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Janice G. Fournillier, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Gwendolyn T. Benson, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Brian A. Williams, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Phillip E. Gagne, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Date

William L. Curlette, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Educational Policy Studies

R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Kim R Ramsey-White
80 Trelawney Circle
Covington, GA 30016

The Director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Jennifer Esposito
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education
Georgia State University

CURRICULUM VITAE

Kim R. Ramsey-White

ADDRESS: 80 Trelawney Circle
Covington, GA 30016

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2012	Urban Public Research University Educational Policy Studies
M.P.H.	1997	University of Alabama-Birmingham Maternal and Child Health
B.S.	1983	Hampton University Marketing

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2009-present	Evaluation and Research Consultant White and Associates, Covington, GA
2008-2011	Director of Diversity Assessment and Research Management Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY
2005-present	University Liaison Urban Public Research University, Atlanta
1996-2005	Data Manager/Youth Services Director Project Healthy Grandparents, Atlanta, GA

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

2007-present	National Association of Multi-Cultural Education (NAME)
2006-2008	Atlanta Area Evaluation Association (AAEA)
2005-present	American Education Research Association (AERA)

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

White, K., & Sanchez, V. (2010, November). *An introduction to inclusive excellence: In the context of institutional transformation.* Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY.

White, K., Harris, T., & Henry, K. (2010 February). *How College Partners Can Effectively Support an Early College*. State Early College Winter Institute, Peachtree City, GA.

White, K., Sheppard, B. Cote, J., & Lara, P. (2007, February). *Youth Culture: Are You in the Know?* Kiwanis International-Key Leader Facilitation Training, Hampton, GA.

Benson, G., Thornton, M. McCloud, J., & White, K. (2007, February). *One Year After Reinventing An Urban High School and An Urban University Partnership: Lessons Learned at Early College High School.* American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education. New York.

Benson, G., Thornton, M. Deming, R. Dock, R., & White, K. (2006, January). *Early College High School: A University/ School Partnership for Success.* American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education. San Diego, CA .

Sipe, T. A., White, K. (2004, October). *Project Healthy Grandparents: Youth Leadership Program*. Children and Youth Coordinating Council Conference- Kennesaw State University. Kennesaw, GA.

White, K. (2003, November). *Abstinence Education and At-Risk Youth*. Annual Parents and Youth Convocation. Inter-Denominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA.

Whitley, D. M., Kelley, S. J., & White, K. (2002, October). *Saturday Youth Academy: A Mental Health Support Group for Grandchildren Living with Grandparents.* National Association of Social Workers-Georgia Chapter, 14th Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Whitley, D., & White, K.(2001, October). *Saturday Youth Academy: An Innovation for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.* American Public Health Association. Atlanta, GA.

Kelley, S., Whitley, D., & White, K. (2001, July). *Saturday Youth Academy: Mental Health Support for Grandchildren Being Raised by Grandparents.* Child Welfare League of America. Chicago.

Kelly, S., White, K. (2001, June). *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: An Inter-Disciplinary Approach*. American Professional Society Against the Abuse of Children. Washington, DC.

White, K. (2001, March). *Effective Communication with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.* National SIDS Alliance. Chicago.

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Whitley, D. M., White, K. R., Kelley, S. J., & Yorker, B. (1999). Strengths-based case management: A practical application. *Families in Society.(80,2),* 110-119.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING COLLEGE READINESS: SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY COLLEGE STUDENTS

by
Kim R. Ramsey-White

Research shows that too many students are graduating from high school ill-prepared to be successful in the postsecondary environment. This study examined the high school experiences of dual-enrollment students who participated in an Early College High School, and how the students perceived their high school experiences in preparing them for college. Additionally the study sought to understand the role that social capital played in the students' preparation for college. In-depth interviews with 13 African American students, some of whom were first-generation college attendees, were used to illuminate the student voice in an effort to learn how early college practices and strategies were beneficial and/or detrimental to their preparation for college. Data from the study were analyzed using a college readiness framework developed by David Conley (2007) which focuses on four dimensions of college readiness: (1) Key cognitive strategies, (2) academic content, (3) academic skills and behavior, and (4) contextual skills and awareness. Findings from the study indicate that the students' Early College High School experiences increased their confidence as college students (key cognitive strategies), taught them the benefits of time management and working in study groups (academic skills and behavior), and provided meaningful relationships and social networks that allowed them to navigate the college application and financial aid processes (contextual skills and awareness). The students also expressed concern that there was very limited alignment between the high school academic courses and expectations and those in the

postsecondary institutions they attended. The results of the study contribute to the scholarship on the Early College model.

EXPLORING COLLEGE READINESS: SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Kim R. Ramsey-White

A Dissertation

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Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
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in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2012

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1 Corinthians 13 (NIV)

1 *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.***2** *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.***3** *If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* **4** *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.***5** *It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.***6** *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.***7** *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* **8** *Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.* **9** *For we know in part and we prophesy in part,* ***10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.***

This dissertation would not be complete were it not for faith, hope and love. Not just my faith, hope and love but more importantly those of my family and friends. So many times this journey seemed insurmountable, but there was a village behind me that WOULD not let me give up.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIR	American Institutes for Research
ECHSI	Early College High School Initiative
FLC	Freshman Learning Community
GRAD	Graduation Really Achieves Dreams
IB	International Baccalaureate
IHEP	Institute for Higher Education Policy
JFF	Jobs for the Future
MSI	Minority-Serving Institution

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this dissertation research was to understand how Early College students experienced the transition years between high school and college and how they perceived their preparedness for college. Despite a plethora of interventions that focus on improving college readiness in secondary schools, scholarly research has been slow to examine the key factors that contribute to college readiness from the perspective of the student. Often education policymakers and funders create interventions and programming that incorporate research-based strategies tested through quantitatively derived measures, but seldom are qualitative measures used to query the students upon whom these actions are intended to support. In this dissertation, I examine college readiness from the perspective of students who were the first in their state to pioneer an innovative high school reform effort, the Early College High School.

"Mrs. White, give me a break, I know we were your lab rats." These were the words of one of the Early College students that served as the impetus for my desire to ensure that the experiences of the legacy class were properly documented. This work is an attempt to document their experiences in a way that reveals the perspectives of these pioneers as standard bearers of this new high school reform effort. I wanted to honor their courage and tenacity in a way that moves beyond examining their achievement. The student referenced above had been chosen as one of the top 20 students, known at the high school as the "Trailblazing Twenty," to lead the charge and enroll in their first college course during their sophomore year in high school. We recognized that their successes and failures would be examined by all as the litmus test for how students in

early college high schools would fare in the rigor of a postsecondary environment as dual-enrollment high school students. What a daunting responsibility for 15- and 16-year-olds! It has been my privilege to create an opportunity for them to share their experiences and contribute to the scholarly literature on college readiness for early college students.

Background

For over three decades, the United States of America has consistently implemented reforms in an attempt to improve high schools. While progress has been made towards combating achievement gaps, ameliorating high school drop-out rates, and creating access to postsecondary education, educational inequities and unacceptable graduation rates still persist in public education. These inequalities continue to exist for students who are first generation college attenders, members of ethnic minority groups, members of low-income families, and English language-learners (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). These characteristics are also associated with students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the postsecondary environment and are highly correlated with students who reside in urban settings (Land & Letgers, 2002; Noeth & Wimberly). While the term "urban" has become synonymous with negative implications such as low educational achievement, poverty, oppression and racism (Shealey, 2006; Haberman & Post, 1998), that is not the intent of the use of the word in referring to students in this study. The American Heritage College dictionary (1997) simply defines the term urban as an adjective meaning "of or located in a city; or characteristic of the city or city life" (p.1484). In the context of this study, the term *urban student* represents the wide range of human experiences and diverse academic, financial and social conditions of students who attend a high school located in a city.

Over the past decade, a number of school reform initiatives, such as Career Academies, Communities in Schools, and Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), were instituted in a national effort to improve high school graduation rates and access to postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2008). Another promising intervention is the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), which offers students who have traditionally been underrepresented in postsecondary institutions the opportunity to earn college credit in high school. In 2002, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in collaboration with the Carnegie Foundation of New York, The Ford Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and other local foundations, awarded over $28 million to Jobs for the Future (JFF) and seven partner organizations to initiate implementation of the ECHSI. The ECHSI reinvented high schools in an effort to create culturally relevant and meaningful experiences to engage students in the learning process. The ECHSI seeks to address two goals simultaneously: (a) increase the number of minority, low-income and English language-learners entering postsecondary education and (b) combat the abysmal high school graduation rates prevalent in urban school systems (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010).

The early college model is a comprehensive reform model that leverages the shared responsibility and resources of a state K-12 system and a partner institution of higher learning to provide young people from underrepresented groups with the academic preparation and social support that is needed to succeed in postsecondary education (JFF, 2008; Lieberman, 2004; Edmunds, Bernstein, Glennie, Willse, Arshavsky, Unlu, Bartz, Silberman, Scales, & Dallas, 2010). Incorporating a strategy that uses academic challenge as opposed to academic remediation to engage and motivate students, the Early College

High School initiative has shown positive results in improving high school graduation and college access rates for traditionally underrepresented students (Webb & Mayka, 2011). For example, in a 2011 publication examining academic outcomes for early college graduates, Webb and Mayka reported that 73% of Early College High School graduates between 2007-2009 enrolled in college following high school, compared to a nationwide enrollment rate of 69%. A detailed description of the history and current research on the early college school model is provided in Chapter 2.

Statement of the Problem

A decade ago, the United States led the world in college completion rates; today our country is outranked by at least 10 other countries in the number of college degrees attained (Kelly, 2010). To achieve the assertion put forth by President Obama in his February 2009 address to Congress that "by 2020 America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world," greater strides must be made to increase the college-going rates among all young Americans and specifically among students from minority and low income populations.

Despite the marked increases in the number of traditionally underrepresented students who have enrolled in college and earned degrees (Weldon, 2009), there are still significant gaps in degree attainment along racial and socioeconomic lines. Goldberg (2007) reported that 65% of low-income students do not graduate from high school, only 22% of low-income students graduate from high school academically prepared for the postsecondary environment, and only 42% of those who are academically prepared for college actually go on to earn a degree. These statistics indicate that too many students either do not graduate from high school, graduate but do not apply to college, or begin

college only to withdraw shortly after beginning their postsecondary endeavors (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2008).

Multiple studies (Reid & Moore, 2008; Chen, 2005; Warburton et al. 2001; Choy, 2001) examining college access, enrollment, and success patterns of first generation college attenders, many of whom are minority and low-income, conclude that first generation students are more likely than students whose parents did attend postsecondary education to delay enrollment in college, enroll in a two-year school, and or need remedial courses in college. These are all factors that contribute to a reduced likelihood that first generation college students would obtain a bachelor’s degree. The early college initiative, seeks to positively impact first generation college attenders, minority and low-income student’s college access and degree attainment rates by providing academic, financial and social supports (JFF, 2003). While financial and educational supports are important to overcoming the obstacles of postsecondary access, it is equally as important to ensure that students have adequate social support and the information required to assist them with navigating the physical and cultural transition from high school to college (Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2008; JFF). Access to that social support and information is often embedded within the social networks to which students have access (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2004; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These social networks or social relations are the foundation of social capital theory. This theory states that students with social networks are afforded the opportunity to improve their life outcomes academically, socially, and financially (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Within the research on social capital and educational attainment is a growing body of literature focusing on the role of social capital and college-preparedness for

underrepresented students (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Reid & Moore, 2008; Kao, 2004; Israel and Beaulieu, 2004; Kim & Schneider, 2005) Researchers who have conducted studies in this area (e.g., Farmer-Hinton & Adams; Reid & Moore) used the framework of social capital as put forth by Coleman, which purports that social capital is a form of capital that exists in the relationships between people. An individual can use these relationships to access resources and information that otherwise may not have been available to them, in their pursuit of the postsecondary environment and beyond.

Researchers Farmer-Hinton & Adams (2006), Israel & Beaulieu (2004), Reid & Moore (2008), Kao (2004) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) have conducted research on the role of social capital as an important variable in understanding student success and academic achievement in both the high school and postsecondary environments. However, there is still paucity in the literature related to the role of social capital in college-preparedness for students participating in early college schools. Social capital stands to serve as an important contributor to how underrepresented students acquire information and knowledge that will contribute to their ability to gain access to the postsecondary environment and then persist to graduation (Gonzalez, Stone, & Jovel, 2003). Improving opportunities for underrepresented students to overcome enrollment and retention barriers in postsecondary institutions has been a priority for quite some time, yet the gaps in academic achievement, enrollment and retention remain (Martinez & Kloppott, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Somers, Owens & Pilasky, 2008). A detailed discussion of the origins and applications of social capital in educational research is provided in Chapter 2.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Early College High School students describe their high school experiences as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. When policymakers and school administrators routinely neglect to solicit the voice of students during reform planning and implementation, their direction can be underminded, particularly if their plans conflict with the concerns of the students (Cushman, Cervone & Rowley, 2003; Lee, 1999; Miron & Lauria, 1998). Schools that purposefully demonstrate an effort to incorporate student interest in curricular and topics; actively involve students in school wide councils and teams; and diligently work to create greater academic and social supports are schools that foster a culture of empowerment for students (Lee). Empowered students make for powerful allies in the realm of reform. Their lived experiences, when solicited and valued, can serve to best inform and develop successful strategies for increasing student achievement and positive educational outcomes.

The research questions for the study were as follows:

1. What were early college students' perceptions, as dual enrollment students, regarding their high school experiences?
2. How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success?
3. How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

Significance

Numerous studies have examined the effect of early admittance to college for younger students (e.g., Cornell, Callahan, & Lloyd, 1991; Janos, Robinson & Lunneborg, 1989; Lupkowski, Whitmore & Ramsay, 1992). Most of these studies, however, focused on students who were above-average academic achievers. Additionally, a number of studies have documented the experiences of first-year college students (Higbee, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008). However, little research exists that examines the effects of early entrance to college on average or low-achieving high school students or documents their experience attending college after matriculating as a dually enrolled high school-college student.

Given the current emphasis on education reform efforts which encourage early entrance to college for middle and high school students, empirical research is needed to help direct implementation efforts and inform policy. Hoffman et al. (2008) discussed three accelerated learning outcomes related to early college entrance for students: traditional dual enrollment, dual enrollment pathways and early college schools.

Traditional dual enrollment programs offer high achieving high school students the opportunity to take college courses that will count for both high school and college credit. The traditional dual enrollment program has been available for several decades as an "escape from high school" for high achieving juniors and seniors; however, the program has more recently been restructured to serve as a mechanism to engage a wider range of students on the path to college and technical educations (Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2008; Martinez & Kloppott, 2005).

Dual enrollment pathways are structured for students who might require more remediation in the postsecondary environment. Students who participate in the dual

enrollment pathways option typically have two to four preselected college courses, one of which is usually a “college 101” course.

The *early college school* model, which is targeted towards underrepresented students, is also built on the tradition of dual enrollment, promoting a student’s ability to earn a high school diploma while simultaneously earning an associate’s (2-year) degree, all tuition free. These approaches provide the opportunity for middle and high school students to earn college credit prior to graduation from high school. While the traditional dual enrollment option is offered only to high school students, both the dual enrollment pathways option and the early college school model can engage students in college courses as early as the 6th grade.

There is a significant body of literature (Adelman, 2006; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2008; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005; Martinez & Kloppott, 2005) on traditional dual enrollment programs that substantiate the benefits of dual enrollment on college completion rates for all students, including those who have traditionally been underrepresented in the postsecondary environment. However, additional research is required to thoroughly examine the benefits associated with dual enrollment pathways and early college school models (Hoffman et al., 2008). This study seeks to add to the body of literature on the success of the students participating in the early college program and to garner a better understanding of the factors that influence and promote successful outcomes for students participating in the early college school program. It is imperative that scholars continue research in this area, as many of the students who take part in early college program are students who are typically underrepresented in postsecondary

education and/or students who are at high-risk for dropping out of high school (JFF, 2008).

Unique opportunities are available for an exploration of the relationships that exist between high schools and universities, and their potential for building social capital among early college students. The research on school-based social capital asserts and reinforces the importance of institutional agents such as teachers and counselors in assisting students with negotiating the structural barriers associated with access to information and norms that ease the transition to postsecondary education (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Lee & Croninger, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

This study contributes unique insight into the early college model, as it examines the experiences of students at one Early College High School. Additionally, it contributes to the literature on college access and retention for underrepresented youth. The results of the study will provide valuable insight for early college high school administrators, university partners, and early college intermediaries on the relationship between social support and college readiness from the students' perspective. In addition, the results of this study will contribute to the limited literature on early college high schools and the ways in which school and university partnerships can most effectively impact improved access and retention in early college students.

Definitions of Terms

A number of terms are used throughout this study that warrant definitions. These terms have been used in the literature with slight variations of meaning depending upon the context of the discussion. To ensure consistency within my study, I have included a

list of terms and how they are defined for this study. The terms e*arly college high school*, *early college,* and *early college school* are used interchangeably in this study. When the initiative began in 2002, the premise was that all schools would start with students in the ninth or tenth grade; however as the initiative developed new models included schools that began in the middle grades. To account for those differences, the term *early college school* was incorporated in the model descriptions (Berger, Adelman & Cole, 2010). *Postsecondary education* refers to all education and training beyond high school. This includes four-year colleges, community colleges, and training programs. One of the cornerstones of the early college model is *school and university partnerships.* These partnerships are collaborations between K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Most notably in this study the K-12 segment consisted of high schools and middle schools and institutions of higher education were two-year colleges, community colleges, or four-year colleges (Laguardia, 1998). *Underrepresented students* are defined as students who are first-generation college attendees, low-income, minority, and/or English language learners. These students are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions of higher education. In addition, based on population trends, these students are also typically concentrated in urban areas and are also be referred to as *urban students* in the context of this study (JFF, 2008). Finally, *college readiness* as described in this study is based on David Conley's (2007) research, which asserts that a student is college ready when the student has the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation. The four dimensions of college readiness as described by Conley include key cognitive

strategies, academic content, academic skills and behaviors, and college knowledge. These dimensions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that undergirds this study derives strength from social capital theory. However, it is important to define the period of adolescence, as this is the period that the students are being interviewed. The age of adolescence is the time when young people transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence, as described by Born (2006), is marked with experimentation and development across many personal, intellectual, sexual, and political domains. This time of development and experimentation typically does not occur in isolation. Rather, this happens with others in their peer group. While adolescence may be seen as a time when young people achieve independence, Christie and Viner (2005) argue that perhaps it is more accurate to discuss the ways in which adolescents change the balance between independence and dependence with others who are a part of their social networks (parents, peers, community members). The effect of this balance will depend upon the social and cultural expectations expressed by members of those networks (Christie & Viner). By gaining insight into the ways in which adolescents develop, engage and understand the social relationships and social norms in their lives, I am better positioned as a researcher to understand how to support them academically and socially.

The use of social capital theory provides a framework that affords me an understanding of what social networks and elements of social support impact college readiness and the transition to the postsecondary environment for early college students. A growing body of literature (Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Israel and Beaulieu, 2006; Stanton-

Salazar, 1997) suggests strongly that social capital plays an influential role in promoting educational achievement and consequently leads to increased social mobility and life outcomes.

In this study, I investigate if social capital theory, especially those attributes related to information channels, is related to college readiness within the framework of the early college high school model. This study differs from other research on social capital in that it did not measuring variables of social capital related to college readiness. Instead, I sought to understand how students perceive their sources of social capital and how those networks affect their college preparedness from the perspective of the early college.

Social Capital Theory

The concept of social capital has had prominence in the literature for well over four decades. Social capital theory's roots are found in the discipline of sociology, but it has been extended to explain phenomena in many of the social sciences, including education. The theory is bound in economic terms and is constructed as a resource that individuals are able to build up, trade and exhaust. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced social capital as a concept that could describe resources inhered in the institutionalized relationships of social networks. Bourdieu stressed the importance of social capital's role in increasing access to economic and cultural capital, thereby affecting the ways in which an individual can maneuver through life choices. Bourdieu (1986) and American sociologist James Coleman (1988) are often credited as the scholars who formulated the original theoretical development of the social capital concept. Both scholars focused on the benefits that individuals and/or small groups obtain by virtue of

their social relationships with others, and the ways in which social capital facilitates increased access to other forms of capital such as material, physical and cultural. In Coleman's most cited work *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital* (1988), he argued that social capital is an intangible resource that is similar to physical and human capital in that it is productive and makes possible certain outcomes that in the absence of said capital would not be probable. However, Coleman also asserted that social capital differs from physical and human capital in that it is not completely fungible, meaning that it may or may not be freely traded or replaced for something else just like it. Coleman also posited that social capital is not a single entity, but a variety of entities with two things in common: They are contrived of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors. Social capital is an asset which is rooted in social relations (Farmer-Hinton &Adams, 2006; Lee & Croninger, 1999; Coleman, 1988; Bordieu, 1985), and which has the potential to increase and or improve life outcomes for individuals.

Elements of Social Capital

Coleman (1988) asserted that there are three properties inherent within social capital that results in resources for individuals. The first, consisting of obligations, trustworthiness, and expectations, is defined by the belief that relationships are trustworthy and that there are certain obligations created by the interactions of individuals in the relationships. These obligations can be seen as credit slips that when enough have been acquired, become accumulated capital for future services and or information. Information channels are the second element, representing the potential for the acquisition of information that resides in social relations. Social ties have the potential of providing an individual with pertinent information about opportunities and services that

may otherwise have not been available (Lin, 2001). Finally, norms and effective sanctions are the third element and represent the rules that govern or shape the behavior of a group or community, guiding people to behave in a specific way. Each property has the potential to cultivate social capital for individuals. This study examines all three of these elements relevant to understanding how the early college model affects the college readiness of students in the program.

Social Capital versus Social Support

Social support, much like social capital, has been examined very closely in the research literature; however, seldom in the literature would one find any clear delineation or explanation of the difference between the two. This may be a function of the notion of social support as embedded within the concept of social capital in the form of social networks.

Malecki and Demaray (2006) define social support as “one’s perception of supportive behaviors from individuals in his or her social network (e.g., parents, teachers, classmates close friends, school), that enhance functioning and/or may buffer him or her from adverse outcomes” (p. 376). Tardy (1985) and others have defined social support as deriving from multiple sources as well (e.g., parents, teachers) but further conceptualized that there are specific types of social support, including emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational (House & Kahn, 1985). Often in the literature, social support is examined only from the emotional aspect; seldom do researchers explore the other elements. A holistic examination of social support in the context of both the types of support and the sources of support that students perceive as helpful, may contribute to

improving the support that students receive from the individuals in their lives (Malecki & Demaray).

The terms “social support” and “social networks” are sometimes used interchangeably in the social support literature (Hutchinson, 1999). It is important to distinguish between the two, as it is quite possible for social networks to be sources of both stress and support (Wellman, 1981). To understand how these concepts may differ, it is necessary to separate the structure of a relationship or network from the function or action of the relationship or network (Hutchinson). For example, families (structural) serve as social networks to students; their supportive or nonsupportive behaviors (functions) are imparted upon the student in terms of emotional, instrumental, informational or appraisal support.

While in this study I examined the perceptions of college readiness and not academic achievement, the two constructs are very closely related. Therefore, the inference here is that if social support can be a significant contributor to improved academic achievement, it would also reproduce positive outcomes in preparing students for their postsecondary experience. The literature on the relationship between social support and academic achievement in minority students is extensive. Malecki and Elliot (1999) reported a small but significant relationship between students’ perceived social support and GPA, as well as a small but significant relationship between teacher support and GPA. In their investigation of social factors related to African American student’s school performance, Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008) found that social support from parents, classmates, teachers, close friends, and schools were all significantly correlated with GPA and student’s educational intentions.

In a study of social support and its relevance to minority populations, Kao (2004) examined how the various types of social support interrelate to govern the behavior of groups and group members. Kao noted the importance of families and schools in transferring social capital to students and relayed the fact that social capital can also work against positive educational outcomes. She argued that it is not unimaginable that there could be social norms within families and peer groups that support unconstructive behaviors, which in turn lead to negative educational outcomes. This proposition is germane to the tenets of this study in that many early college students, who are first-generation college attendees, could have had parents not familiar with college culture or who had negative secondary education experiences that could impact the way in which their student constructs knowledge about finishing high school or attending college.

"To Be the Lab Rat": How This Study Got Started

I was employed as the college liaison at the early college high school where the study took place. As the liaison I was responsible for ensuring a smooth transition for the students between the secondary and postsecondary environments. As is the case with any new undertaking, there were unexpected obstacles and miscommunications between the high school and the college; however, as the liaison between the two environments, I worked diligently to maneuver around obstacles and assist in the formalization of the relationships between both entities. As the students approached the semester in which they would enroll in both high school and college, everyone's level of anxiety increased. This program was poised to make an invaluable impact not only on increasing the high school graduation rates, but also increasing access to postsecondary education for students enrolled.

During the spring semester of the students' second year in high school, 20 pioneers who came to be known as the Trailblazing Twenty, enrolled at the post-secondary institution. I rode the bus with them that day; they were remarkably calm, quite contrary to what I expected from them. As they disembarked from the yellow school bus affectionately known as the "Cheese," there was an education correspondent from the local television station, waiting with microphone and camera crew to interview this courageous group of young people and myself. The students were impressive, calm, poised, and very articulate. The cameras followed them from the time they left the bus until they sat down in their seats in the classroom—so much for anonymity about being in high school and college at the same time. As the reporter interviewed me, I shared my enthusiasm and hope for these students, and I was humbled that I was involved in such a momentous opportunity. All of the 20 students were first-generation college attenders, which meant that they all represented a change in the educational lineage of their families. The hope represented in these students would affect generations of students to come; so much was riding on the success and failure of these students. Many people told the students how important it was for them to do their best, outperform the traditional students, and pave the way for their peers in the fall semester. At the end of the semester when grades were released, about half of the students passed their class with a "C" or above and the other half received a "D" or "F." Accolades were extended to all the students for completing the semester and trying their best. Individual debriefings were conducted by teachers, the high school administrator, an associate dean from the college, and myself with each of the students to determine from their perspective what things worked well and what things did not. When I engaged in an informal conversation with

one of the students who had failed his course, I asked him what had happened and, why he failed the class. He responded to me “C’mon Mrs. White give me a break, I know I was your lab rat.” I could not argue with him. They were the first group of students in the state to test this model. They allowed us to learn from their mistakes.

The statement, “I know I was your lab rat” left such an impression on me that I decided to dig deeper. From my perspective, a lab rat has no connectedness to the researcher, there is no personal relationship with the lab rat, and the researcher willingly accepts that the lab rat is expendable and capable of being sacrificed. I did not like how that made me feel, and it forced me to consider just what was at stake for these 20 students and the contingent of students that would follow in their footsteps. I realized that the students were sacrificing a significant period of their lives to be a part of this new initiative. It was at this point that I realized my desire to provide a platform for the students to share their stories about what it was like being an early college student. I saw the opportunity to use my doctoral research as a venue to convey their stories and contribute to the scholarly literature on early college students and college readiness.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the topic and research problem. Despite a 20+ year focus on high school reform and improved access to postsecondary education for minority, low-income and English language learners, there are still significant gaps in access and retention which warrant investigation. The purpose of this study was to investigate how early college high school students describe their high school experiences and how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. The high school students’ voices concerning strategies for effective preparation for the

postsecondary environment are conspicuously missing from the literature. This chapter also included the definition of terms relevant to the study, introduced the theoretical perspective and identified the research questions that guided the inquiry. Social capital theory was discussed as the conceptual framework for understanding how students' networks and relationships contributed to their experiences as early college students. In Chapter 2, I examine the relevant literature related to the early college model, social capital, educational research and college readiness.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of this study was to examine early college high school students' perceptions of their college readiness and the role in which social capital played in regard to their access and persistence in postsecondary institutions. In an effort to garner a better understanding of how social capital and social support impact college readiness in early college high school students, this review will examine three areas of scholarship: early college schools, social capital theory, and college readiness. The literature on early college schools reviews the theory behind the model and how that theory and the strategies of the initiative align with the tenets of social capital theory. The review of the literature on social capital theory includes a discussion on the ways in which social capital has been conceptualized and applied in educational research with regards to college readiness. Finally, the literature review on college readiness examines the discourse related to salient best practices and strategies focusing on improving college readiness in secondary education.

Early College Schools

> America's high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed, and under-funded—though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean that our high schools—even when they're working exactly as designed—cannot teach our kids what they need to know today. (Bill Gates, 2005)

The national agenda on education in the United States has made it clear that every American needs an education through 2 years of college or vocational training (Department of Education, 2010). The challenge here is how do we ensure that students are adequately prepared in high school and able to be successful in their postsecondary experiences. We need only look at some of the more prevalent trends in the K-16 system

which illustrate the disparities in educational outcomes for students across income and racial/ethnic lines and prove that these still hover in an unacceptable range. The research tells us that only 11% of the low-income eighth grade students in the class of 2001 are expected to earn a college degree by 2014 and that students from the middle and upper income classes are five times more likely to earn a 2- or 4-year degree then low-income students, and the scope of work that still needs to be done is very clear (Goldberg, 2007). These disparaging data support the need for radical and innovative approaches that will address the gaps in the K-12 system that impede low-income and other traditionally underrepresented students from engaging in the postsecondary environment. There is a robust field of high school reform efforts engaged in the work of reversing the negative trends related to postsecondary access for underrepresented students. The initiatives vary across approach and design but are focused on increasing college readiness for all students, giving particular attention to students who are minority, low-income, English language learners, and first generation college attenders.

One such initiative is the early college school model. It is a reform model that seeks to provide underserved students with the opportunity to take college classes while in high school. The initiative is a network of small autonomous schools that seek to integrate the high school and college experience for students who have traditionally been underrepresented and underserved in postsecondary education. Early college schools are small schools–schools of 450 or less across all grade levels–that provide opportunities for their students to have a structured college experience while simultaneously earning high school and college credit. The philosophy of the program is captured in the idea that academic challenge not remediation will address the needs of students who may be

disenfranchised in traditional school settings. The incentive of earning college credit while in high school may motivate students to see themselves as active participants in the postsecondary experience (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). Early College High Schools are designed so that within 4-5 years of entering high school, students have the opportunity to earn up to 2 years of college credit (JFF, 2002).

Background of the Early College Movement

Early College High Schools are an extension of another innovative high school reform model, the Middle College High School. The first middle college high school was established in 1974 by Dr. Janet Lieberman on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City. Dr. Lieberman's goal was to creatively meet the academic, vocational and affective needs of underserved youth and to encourage them to believe that a college education was attainable. Dr. Lieberman established the middle college program believing that establishing a small, nurturing, innovative high school with creative pedagogical inputs on a college campus would capitalize on the "power of place" and stimulate and inspire underserved students to believe that a college education was within their reach.

In 2000, Dr. Lieberman and Dr. Cecilia Cunningham, co-directors of the Middle College National Consortium, advanced the Middle College High School model by conceptualizing and creating the Early College High School model. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the early college model pilot program created an opportunity for students who were previously underachieving in high school to take college courses in their 11th and 12th grade years of high school. This acceleration in college course work provided an opportunity for students to be able to earn an associate's degree in a shortened period of

time (Lieberman, 2004). The early college model while fundamentally based on the experience and lessons of the middle college high school, would add new structural elements, such as stronger collaboration between secondary and higher education and a more formal opportunity for accelerated learning options (Lieberman, 2004). The early college model as set forth by Lieberman and Cunningham would seek to accomplish the following objectives:

- Reach out to students who are underserved by the regular schools;
- Demand a cooperative relationship between the district high school administration and the college president;
- Offer a different sequence of courses from the tenth grade and an accelerated program from the ninth grade to the associate's degree, which can be achieved in five years or less, instead of six;
- Combine the resources of a high school on the college campus with the college facilities (gym, library, cafeteria), making them all available to the early college high school student;
- Require active college campus collaboration from the college administrative structure: faculty interchange, support from the college divisions of finance, admissions, scheduling, and counseling under a college-appointed administrator;
- Enhance the role of high school faculty; and
- Integrate high school and college study in an articulated program.

In conjunction with these objectives the theoretical rationale that drove the model emanated from the developmental psychology literature (Lieberman, 2004) highlighting that:

- Intellectual maturation is a continuous process: there is little or no difference between a student at the conclusion of the twelfth grade and the beginning of college enrollment. Therefore, learning should be a continuous process; the transitions should be smooth; and the curriculum between high school and college should be coordinated.
- Challenge, both academic and personal, is a strong motivator for achievement.
- Positive role models improve behavior.
- Flexible use of time advances opportunities for mastery.
- Teachers involved in reform have increased motivation for success; caring teachers improve students' success.

Lieberman was adamant in her belief that the structural and theoretical components of the model were inextricably tied to each other. She proposed that the pieces worked together in much the same way a jigsaw puzzle works and that to omit or alter any element would only reduce the efficacy of the model.

Early College High School Initiative

In 2002, the Gates Foundation invested in Lieberman's work by committing $350 million to the Early College High School Initiative. Along with the support of the Carnegie Foundation of New York, The Ford Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and other local philanthropic organizations, the Gates Foundation inaugurated the reform effort with the opening of three early college high schools during the 2002-2003 school year.

The initiative sought to address two goals: (1) improve the secondary experience for high school students, especially the broad population of students who have been

traditionally underrepresented in the postsecondary environment, and (2) increase the college readiness and subsequent college experience for these students (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). To achieve those goals, the ECHSI maintained the integrity of the Middle College concept by ensuring that participating schools incorporated the small school approach, provided meaningful college exposure to its students, offered structured academic supports, and ensured a student-centered learning environment where close, high-quality relationships with adults were maintained (Nodine, 2009).

Although the Early College model drew heavily from the Middle College concepts, Early College differed in significant ways. First and foremost, Early College schools offer all of their students the opportunity to earn a significant number of transferable college credits while still in high school. While it is true that some Middle College students earned college credit in high school, it was not emphasized that this option was expected for all students. Not all Early Colleges were located on college campuses as were middle college schools.

In addition to the Gates Foundation, another key player in the implementation of this initiative was Jobs for the Future, an action/research and policy organization that promotes innovative reform in education and workforce development As the overarching intermediary for the ECHSI, JFF was charged with the responsibility to coordinate, manage and be a policy advocate for the Early College Initiative (JFF, 2002). JFF took on the critical role of developing relationships with organizations that were interested in and had the capabilities to start new early college schools. They also provided opportunities for these organizations to build professional development learning communities and to facilitate coalition building among organizations that had not traditionally worked

together. Gates had initially invested in seven partner organizations, including JFF, to launch the first 100 schools of the initiative; however, that group quickly expanded to 13 partner organizations, or intermediaries, as they later became known (see Appendix E for a list of these organizations). These organizations represented a variety of players in the educational reform effort, including state education systems, constituency-based organizations, community foundations and national school reform models and have been responsible for the opening of over 200 early college schools since 2002. These 13 intermediary organizations have formed the foundation of the ECHSI and have committed to the work of blending the secondary and postsecondary experiences of students who probably would not have seen themselves as college material (Berger et al., 2010). In 2002 the initiative began, guided by a set of core principles. These principles were discussed and debated over the first 5 years of program and in 2008, were revised and ratified to reflect a set of core principles that better represented the vision of the initiative (see Table 1).

What sets the Early College initiative apart from other reform efforts is the expectation that most students, not just those considered to be advanced academically, would enroll in some college courses and with the support of the school have successful progression onto college. Nodine (2009) asserted that prior to the initiation of the early college initiative, were it not for the advanced placement program, there would be no meaningful "curricular coherence and sequencing between the senior year of high school and postsecondary education" (p. 6). Early college schools have the potential to be the conduit that promotes a viable seamless system between the secondary and postsecondary experiences.

Table 1

Original Core Principles and Revised Core Principles

Original Principles (2002-2008)	Revised Principles (2008-present)
ECHSs serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.	ECHS are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education
Students earn an associate's degree or 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.	ECHS are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success;
The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.	ECHS jointly develop an integrated academic program with their higher education partners so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion;
The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the ECHS.	ECHS engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion; and
The ECHSs demonstrate the attributes of highly effective high schools.	ECHS work with initiative partners to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement.

Early College and Dual Enrollment

The goals and rationale of the initiative sought to change a paradigm of hopelessness and low expectations for the most marginalized students in the education system (Lieberman, 2004). By focusing on the students who had historically been under-served as a result of the divide between the K-12 and postsecondary institution, the initiative challenged the prevailing thought about what these students were capable of

doing in high school (Webb & Mayka, 2011). Earning college credit in high school through the dual enrollment program was not commonplace for low-income, minority and first-generation college students. While dual enrollment has been available for several decades, it has historically been available only to those high school students who were in the academic top tier of their classes. Many believed less advanced students would not be able to withstand the rigor of college courses, that they would be academically unprepared for the opportunity. It was also thought that giving them “easy access” to college would inhibit their motivation to strive for high achievement in their high school courses (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). The notion of relaxing the requirements of the dual enrollment program to enable access to a wider variety of students was novel to say the least.

Dual enrollment has also been called dual credit, concurrent enrollment, college in high school, and joint enrollment (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2010; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). The program typically allows juniors and seniors in high school to take college courses that will count for credit at both the high school and the college. The college course usually is taken in place of a class that is required in high school and is offered for free or at discounted tuition. This financing caveat helps to eliminate or reduce the financial barriers that some low-income families may encounter in being able to send their children to college.

Easing the psychological transition between high school and college is another benefit of dual enrollment programs (Bailey, Hughes & Karp, 2002; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007). Many dual enrollment courses are taken on college campuses, thereby creating an opportunity for students to experience

college culture, both the academic and extracurricular sides, first hand while having the support and guidance of their support system at the high school.

Recent research on dual enrollment also supports that there are very positive outcomes for students that participate in the program (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005; Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; Bailey & Karp, 2003). Berger et al. (2010) reported that students who had taken college courses in high school were more likely to enroll in college and more likely to enroll in a four-year college, as well as have higher college GPAs and earn more credits in their first three years of college than students with no college experience in high school. Additionally, research (Abell, 2007; Adelman, 2006) has shown that students who accumulate at least 20 college credits by the end of their first year of college are much more likely to persist to graduation. Therefore, if underrepresented students who participate in the early college program capitalize on an intensive program of study, it would be reasonable to assume that they would increase the likelihood of their persistence in the college environment (Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2010)

Early College Outcomes

Using the first four early college principles as a guide, this section explores the most recent outcome data on access and persistence rates available for the initiative. No data are available to date regarding college completion rates for those students seeking a four year college degree, as the first cohort to graduate from an early college program, would have just done so this past spring. However, the data that are available regarding access and persistence for early college students shows favorable outcomes. Additionally, no progress will be reported on core principle five as there has been little to no research conducted in this area as of yet.

Core Principle1: Early Colleges are committed to serving students under-represented in higher education. The data support the claim that early college schools are diligently working to enroll high percentages of minority and low-income students (AIR/SRI, 2008). Drawing on data from the early college student information system Berger et al. (2010) reported that 70% of early college students are students of color (see Figure 1) and that at least 59% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Core Principle 2: Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success. Partnering with an institution of higher education (IHE) has always been a defining feature of the initiative (Berger et al., 2010). The model's success is predicated on a commitment from both the K-12 system and their higher education partner to work collaboratively to provide early college students with both the academic and social supports that they will need to be successful in the postsecondary environment (Hooker & Brand, 2009). Most (65%) early colleges partner with a 2-year IHE, which is not surprising given the community college's mission to serve a diverse student population and their admissions policies, which favor under-represented students. Approximately 24% of the schools partner with 4-year institutions, and 11% partner with both 2-year and 4-year institutions (Webb & Mayka, 2011).

The type of IHE that a school partners with is important, especially as considera-tion is given to capitalizing on the "power of place" (Cunningham & Matthews, 2007; Lieberman, 2004; Nodine, 2009). Fifty percent of the early colleges are located on a college campus, while 47% are in freestanding or traditional buildings and 3% are on a tribal reservations to serve Native-American students (JFF, 2010). Being on a college

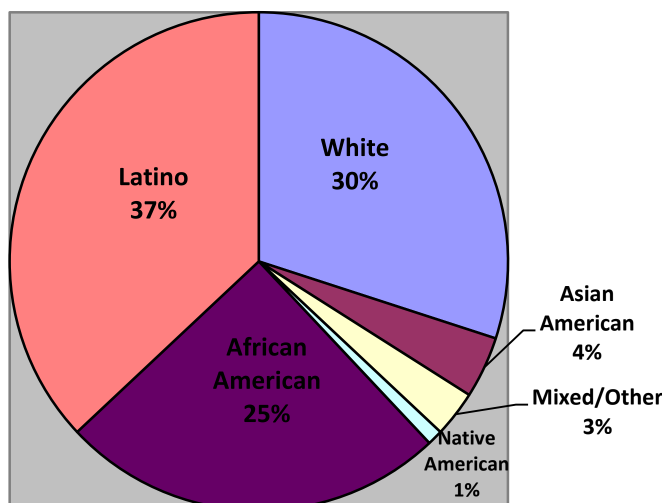

Figure 1. Race and Ethnicity of Early College Students. *Source:* Berger et al., 2010.

campus has been shown to build a students' identity as a college goer and is associated with helping students to build knowledge about the college culture and expectations. The opportunity to learn about college, by attending classes on campus, using the facilities such as the gym and library, and interacting with other college students enables early college students to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities (Hooker & Brand, 2009).

Core Principal 3: Early colleges and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion. This core principal is one that was significantly altered from its original intent. The second core principle in the original set stipulated that ALL early college students would earn an associate's degree or up to two years of college credit. (JFF, 2003). As early colleges developed and the realities of implementation set in, many schools made adjustments to this principle. Some developed programs of study that allowed some but not all students

to work towards the associate's degree, while others focused on getting all students at least some college credit, albeit not two years' worth (Adelman, Berger, & Cole, 2010). The current principle reflects a modified goal of getting ALL students at least one year of college credit, which still may prove to be a stretch for many schools. Consider that only 61% of the early college students that completed a student survey during the 2007-2008 academic year stated that they had taken at least one college class and only 73% of the students in that graduating class reported taking at least one class. This indicates that approximately 27% of that class never took a college class (Webb & Mayka, 2011).

To the credit of the initiative, the collective early college class of 2009 graduated 3,000 students from 64 early colleges. These students earned an average of 20 or more college credits, and 39% of these students earned at least 1 year of transferable credit. Twenty-five percent of the class earned two full years of college credit or an Associate's degree (JFF, 2010).

Core Principal 4: Early Colleges engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion. It should come as no surprise that given the needs of early college students, formalized support structures are an integral part of the model. Many schools have struggled to strike a balance between offering too much support and teaching students how to access the necessary resources that they need in order to be successful in college. Helping students to be self-advocates reinforces and builds college readiness skills in the domain of what has been termed college knowledge. It has been shown that the majority of early college schools offer some formalized support in the areas of literacy skills, research, mathematics and college life skills courses

(AIR & SRI, 2008). The degree to which students were mandated to participate in these formalized academic supports varied across schools.

Additionally, many schools offered students and parents the opportunity to participate in workshops and seminars focused on completing college applications and applying for financial aid. The research is clear that the one of the most vulnerable places in the postsecondary pipeline occurs during the transition from high school to college (Kirst, 2004). To lessen the chance that students will be unable to navigate the cumbersome college admissions process, early college schools seek to provide assistance around that transition process.

Overall, it would seem that the early college initiative has made great strides in successfully implementing the core principles. There are variations in how schools operate but the overall there appears to be adherence to the principles.

Social Capital and Educational Research

Social capital theory has been used in a number of studies as a theoretical framework to investigate the role of social and academic networks as facilitators to the transition from secondary to postsecondary education for students underrepresented in college (Adelman, 2006; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Martinez & Klopott, 2005). The theory is used to conceptualize social relationships, focusing on the structure and the quality of social ties while also identifying networks of social relations (Stone, 2003). The literature documents the benefits of social relationships and the significant role they play in the areas of self-concept (Reid & Moore, 2008), social skills (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) and educational attainment (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) proposed that the increase in research on the socialization of minority students was a direct result of years of neglect and minimization by mainstream researchers who did not acknowledge the societal forces that differentiated the socialization of minority students from middle-class, White students. The early college model, which targets students who are minority, at risk of dropping out of high school, first-generation college attendees and from low socioeconomic status, is uniquely positioned for examining the ways in which social networks and the socialization process are infused in the education process of early college students.

As previously stated, Coleman (1988) proposed that there are three properties associated with the acquisition of social capital. Based on these tenets of social capital theory, the early college model strategies and core principles represent key elements to support obligations, expectations and trustworthiness; information channels; and norms and effective sanctions for early college students. While the model itself, being inanimate, cannot build social capital, the institutional agents—people who have the "capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 6)—can.

According to Stanton-Salazar (1997), institutional agents, while popularly seen as teachers, clergy, social workers, and the like, can also be school peers or members of middle-class families. Stanton-Salazar's definition was specific to mentioning only middle-class families: This is problematic because it erases the potential contributions that members of low-income families may have in the transmission of social capital to students within those families. In the context of this study, I presumed that all partners of

the early college model—teachers, administrators, family members, higher education partners, and school peers—have the capacity to serve as institutional agents.

The property of social capital most relevant to this study is the potential for transmission of information that exists within social relations. When students are able to use their social networks in the context of information sharing and that information results in the facilitation of some positive action on the students behalf, there has been a transmission of social capital (Coleman, 1988). In the case of college readiness for early college students, the transmission of information related to the college selection process, the admissions process, financial aid applications, college culture and other elements of college knowledge all serve to increase resources and facilitate a smoother transition into the postsecondary environment.

Coleman (1988) suggested that the element of obligations and trustworthiness depends on two essential elements: the trustworthiness of the social environment and the extent to which obligations are held. In the case of early college, students are relying heavily on the adults in their schools to provide information that accurately reflects their competencies, skills and ability to succeed in college. So without a high degree of trustworthiness between the students and the institutional agents in their network, students will never attain the necessary level of confidence that they will need to succeed in the postsecondary environment.

Additionally, obligations are founded within the trust that one party has for the other. A breach in the trustworthiness of the environment can compromise the acquisition of social capital in spite of information sharing and high expectations. The term obligation implies that one person does something for another and then trusts that that

person will reciprocate a deed sometime in the future (Coleman, 1988). To put it in terms of education, early college teachers extend high expectations to students, and in turn are obligated to present the students with instruction that will facilitate the student being able to meet those expectations. If the teacher violates the students' trust, by not providing instruction that engages the student there is a breach in the trustworthiness of the environment.

The final relevant property is the element of norms and effective sanctions. Coleman (1988) suggested that norms serve as a powerful form of social capital, especially when within a collectivity, such as cohorts of high school students in a dual enrollment class on a college campus; the prescribed norm "is that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interests of the collectivity" (p. 104). This is very important for students who are developing academic behaviors contrary to what has been expected of them throughout their high school tenure. The establishment and articulation of norms and expectations facilitates the transmission of social capital to students.

College Readiness

A National Imperative

> In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity it is a prerequisite. (U.S. President Barack Obama, February 2009 address to the Joint session of the U.S. Congress)

Despite the fact that over the past few decades there has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in college there are still considerable disparities in the college enrollment rates for minority students, students who are English language learners and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Pitre & Pitre, 2009; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Adelman, 2006; Brand, 2005; Martinez &

Klopott, 2005; Choy, 2001). Between 1984 and 2004, there was a 146% increase in undergraduate enrollment of minority students (Li & Carroll, 2008). This increase raised the proportion of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American undergraduates from 18% in 1984 to 32% in 2004. White student enrollment increased by only 15% during this same time period (Li & Carroll). These statistics support reports that the efforts committed to improving college access for traditionally underrepresented students have been successful. Yet there is equally compelling evidence that increased access has not equated to an increase in college completion rates given that the students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the postsecondary environment tend to be those least prepared to succeed in the college environment (Adelman, 2006; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Reid & Moore, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009).

There is no dearth of studies in the literature regarding the number of students who enter college academically ill-prepared. Consequently, what has resulted is a research agenda focused on identifying strategies and best practices designed to improve college readiness for all students and specifically for at risk population of students such as first generation college attenders (attendees?), minority students, English-language learners and those from low-income households. While an increase in college access for traditionally underrepresented students is admirable and noteworthy, it is the apparent gaps in the graduates' college readiness skills which still jeopardize the ultimate goal of college completion.

Since the 1980s, the financial benefits of obtaining a postsecondary education have continued to move in an upward trajectory for youth from low-income communities, increasing their economic mobility and improving the likelihood of their ability to earn a

family-sustaining wage (Hooker & Brand, 2009). Young people who do not pursue an education beyond high school run a significant risk of leaving themselves isolated in the current labor market (Hooker & Brand; Warburton et al., 2001). The national education agenda has given prominence to the need for all students, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, language background, or disability to be college and career ready, upon graduation from high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This charge will entail state education systems' revising or developing and implementing higher standards in English language arts and mathematics, while also developing comprehensive assessment systems aligned with college and career ready standards that will determine if students have the necessary skills to be successful post high school graduation (U.S. Department of Education). President Obama puts forth the charge to see marked improvements in college completion rates by the year 2020. In his forwarding address of the 2010 publication, *ESEA Blueprint for Reform,* he states, "We must do better. Together, we must achieve a new goal, that by 2020, the United States will once again lead the world in college completion. We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves – this must be a national priority. We must ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career."

The imperative for significant increases in college completion rates stems not just from the benefits that a college degree provides through increased earning potential for college graduates but also, as Wiley, Wyatt, and Camara (2010) reported, from the positive association college completion has with being better citizens, increased political involvement, increased job and life satisfaction, and lawful behavior. Hooker and Brand (2009) also reported that the higher a person's education-level, the more likely he or she

is to report having a positive health status. Higher education attainment has even more sustaining and positive long-term effects for future generations of students, given that parental education is strongly associated with the achievement, college-going rates and future income of children (Hooker & Brand, 2009).

Defining College Readiness

Before deciphering the myriad ways in which college readiness can be interpreted or measured, it is best to stipulate that in the context of this study, college readiness is operationalized as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution (Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand; 2009; ACT, 2005; Wiley et al., 2010). The term "postsecondary institution" is meant to include the full range of educational and in some cases work-related experiences available to a student following graduation from high school. Those experiences include but are not limited to two-year and four-year institutions, technical schools, trade schools and coursework leading to industry or apprenticeship certifications (Conley; Hooker & Brand; Wiley et al.).

Risks of Remediation

College ready students should not have to take any type of remedial coursework upon enrollment in their postsecondary institution. Students who are required to take learning support or remedial classes and/or students who fail an entry level course are more likely to have negative consequences associated with completion (Wiley et al. 2010; Conley, 2007). Enrollment in remedial courses contributes to students having to extend the time needed to complete their college degree and increases the probability that they will not graduate from college (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004;

Adelman 1999). The National Center for Education statistics (2004) also reports that only 17% of students who have to take one remedial class receive a bachelor's degree or higher and for those students required to take two or more remedial classes, only 20% actually complete their degree. While different sources report different numbers, it is estimated that between 28% and 40% of first-time freshmen in four-year institutions enroll in at least one remedial course. For two-year institutions, the percentage of students who are required to take at least one remedial course ranges between 42% and 63% (Wiley et al., 2010). Combined, it is reported that approximately 41% of all first-time freshman students take at least one remedial course (Wirt et al., 2004). It is also reported that nearly 43% of the students who enroll in minority serving institutions (MSIs) take one or more remedial courses because they lack the skills necessary to enroll in entry level credit bearing courses (ACT, 2005). This is significant information to understand given the high percentage of minority students that enroll in MSIs. Overall the percentage of minority students turning to MSIs has steadily increased over the past two decades. In 1984 MSIs accounted for just 38% of minority undergraduate enrollment but by 2004 more than half (58%) of the minority students enrolling in an undergraduate program did so at an MSI (Li & Carroll, 2007).

Income, race/ethnicity and parental education have all been shown to be closely associated with a student's likelihood of having to take a remedial class. A 2004 NCES study examined remedial education along socioeconomic lines and reported that 63% of the students in the lowest quintile (low SES) compared to 24.8% in the top quintile (high SES) had to enroll in a remedial course. In that same study, a review of remediation rates respective to race and ethnicity revealed that 61.7% of African American and 63.2% of

Hispanic students enrolled in a remedial course, while only 34.6% of White students did so. Not surprisingly, first-generation college attenders are also more likely to enroll in a remedial course than students whose parents had obtained a bachelor's degree (Wiley et al., 2010).

Statistically, the consequences of having to enroll in any remedial course can prove detrimental on a student's road to college completion. However, research shows that students who enroll in a reading remedial course are more likely to need an additional remedial course and have a lower likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree. Students who take only a math remedial course are still at risk, but a higher percentage of these students go on to complete their bachelor's degree (Wirt et al., 2004).

Measures of College Readiness

In this era of assessment driven mandates attached to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2009*, more than high stakes tests are required to ensure that high school graduates are prepared to succeed academically and socially in college. Students that have traditionally been underrepresented in the postsecondary environment rely heavily upon their school system not only to prepare them academically for college but also to inform them accurately of their readiness to embark upon their collegiate education. The imperative is for school systems, policy makers and researchers alike to identify a measureable set of skills and attributes that students need in order to ensure that they will be successful in college.

With so much at stake regarding the college readiness of a student, "more and more education initiatives have focused on defining, measuring and improving the college readiness of high school students" (Wiley et al., 2010, p. 2). Recent research on

measuring college readiness has revealed that traditional indicators, such as achievement scores, course taking and high school GPA and rank (Adelman, 2006; Roderick et al., 2009; Conley, 2007; Wiley et al., 2010; ACT, 2005; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002), do not tell a complete enough story of how ready for college a student is. Additionally a review of these indicators across racial/ethnic and income lines reveals the continued disparities that exist for traditionally underrepresented students. To delve deeper into understanding how best to measure college readiness, a number of different entities have committed both their time and resources to examining exactly what content and skills are necessary to reflect a student's preparedness for college accurately (ACT, 2010; Adelman; Choy, 2001; Conley; Higbee, 2000; Wiley et al.; Reid & Moore, 2008; SREB, 2010; Warburton, et al. 2001). In 2002, David Conley led a study cosponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Association of American Universities that was instrumental in establishing new perspectives on college readiness. The *Understanding University Success* study laid the groundwork for developing indices of college readiness that extend beyond an examination of just content knowledge needed for success in college. The two-year study brought together over 400 faculty members from 20 research universities to collaborate on identifying the content knowledge, skills and abilities that students needed to possess in order to succeed in an entry level course at their institution. There was a diverse representation of faculty across disciplines, and all contributed to the development of standards in those courses typically included in the general education courses required during the first two years of college – English, math, natural sciences, social science, foreign language and the arts.

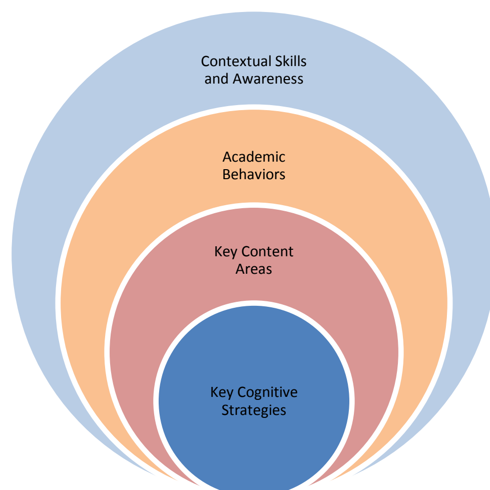

Figure 2. Facets of College Readiness. *Source:* Conley, 2007.

Building upon this early work, Conley (2007) has established a multifaceted model of college readiness that incorporates factors that are both internal and external to the high school environment. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of Conley's expanded view of college readiness. The model incorporates four concentric circles each representing the relevant knowledge and skills that have emerged from the literature and which can be impacted by schools (Conley).

This model of college readiness incorporates a range of both cognitive and noncognitive capabilities that students will need for postsecondary involvement. The research base on the measures of cognitive skills represented by high school academic preparation in core courses, achievement tests and high school GPA and Rank, that students are required to have for college admissions has a long history. Nonetheless, researchers have continued to explore ways to broaden the indices used to evaluate the cognitive skills and attributes that will better reflect the skills needed to be successful in the 21st century college environment. Conley's model has "key cognitive strategies" at

the very core because they represent a foundation which students can build upon. However, the inquiry into noncognitive measures has just recently gained greater prominence in the college readiness literature (Thomas, Kuncel, & Credel, 2007). As the quest to improve access to postsecondary education for underrepresented populations of students has increased, more researchers and decision makers have begun to look at measures beyond standardized testing, high school GPA and courses taken as predictors of college success (Ramsey, 2008). The field of indicators has been expanded to include noncognitive measures, which have been defined by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) as "measures used to evaluate characteristics such as adjustment, motivation, and student perceptions, but are not measureable using typical standardized tests" (Ramsey, 2008, p. 2). In Conley's model, these noncognitive measures are found in the facets of academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness.

In practice the facets of the model do not operate exclusively of each other nor are they perfectly nested within each other. Instead, there is a continuous interaction within and between them (Conley, 2007). The model emphasizes the interconnectedness of all four facets and provides a holistic perspective of what it means to be college ready. It provides a framework for prescribing a better set of criteria upon which college admissions can be based.

Key Cognitive Strategies. Key cognitive strategies represent the requisite skills and knowledge that students need to meet the intellectual demands of college. In previous publications, the term "habits of mind" was used in place of key cognitive strategies, nonetheless both terms describe "patterns of intellectual behavior that lead to the development of cognitive strategies and capabilities necessary for college level work"

(Conley, 2007, p. 12). These are behaviors developed over time and eventually become the habits by which intellectual activities are carried out (Bernard, 2006; Conley). The key cognitive skills shown to be most closely associated with success in college are intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analysis, reasoning, interpretation, precision and accuracy, and problem-solving. Conley's definitions of these skills are provided below.

Intellectual openness. The student possesses curiosity and a thirst for deeper understanding, questions the views of others when those views are not logically supported, accepts constructive criticism, and changes personal views if warranted by the evidence. Such open-mindedness helps students understand the ways in which knowledge is constructed, broadens personal perspectives and helps students deal with the novelty and ambiguity often encountered in the study of new subjects and new materials.

Inquisitiveness. The student engages in active inquiry and dialogue about subject matter and research questions and seeks evidence to defend arguments, explanations, or lines of reasoning. The student does not simply accept as given any assertion that is presented or conclusion that is reached, but asks why things are so.

Analysis. The student identifies and evaluates data, material, and sources for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance. The student compares and contrasts sources and findings and generates summaries and explanations of source materials.

Reasoning (argumentation, proof). The student constructs well-reasoned arguments or proofs to explain phenomena or issues; utilizes recognized forms of reasoning to construct an argument and defend a point of view or conclusion; accepts critiques of or challenges to assertions; and addresses critiques and challenges by

providing a logical explanation or refutation, or by acknowledging the accuracy of the critique or challenge.

Interpretation. The student analyzes competing and conflicting descriptions of an event or issue to determine the strengths and flaws in each description and any commonalities among or distinctions between them; synthesizes the results of an analysis of competing or conflicting descriptions of an event or issue or phenomenon into a coherent explanation; states the interpretation that is most likely correct or is most reasonable, based on the available evidence; and presents orally or in writing an extended description, summary, and evaluation of varied perspectives and conflicting points of view on a topic or issue.

Precision and Accuracy. The student knows what type of precision is appropriate to the task and the subject area, is able to increase precision and accuracy through successive approximations generated from a task or process that is repeated, and uses precision appropriately to reach correct conclusions in the context of the task or subject area at hand.

Problem-solving. The student develops and applies multiple strategies to solve routine problems, generate strategies to solve non-routine problems, and applies methods of problem solving to complex problems requiring method-based problem solving. These key cognitive strategies are broadly representative of the foundational elements that underlie various "ways of knowing."

Key Content Areas. The strategies listed above coupled with academic knowledge and skills are often seen as entities of high school instruction and contain traditional indices used to measure college readiness (Roderick et al., 2009). In addition

the combination of these two facets forms the solid foundation upon which a student must build in order to be successful in college. Mastery of academic knowledge, or what we know as core content knowledge (English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, and the arts) occurs at the intersection of a student's ability to manifest as many key cognitive strategies as possible and the creative and relevant pedagogy of the classroom instructors. Conley purposefully differentiates between academic knowledge and academic skills. Academic skills are not content specific, instead they involve a student's ability to write and reason analytically across disciplines. Different researchers may include academic skills, such as writing, in their designations of college readiness benchmarks. For instance, the American Diploma Project, an initiative of Achieve, Inc., lists such core academic skills as writing, research skills, oral communication, and analytic thinking skills as components of their English standards (American Diploma Project, 2004), yet these are clearly skills that are needed to be successful across all core courses. The ability to write well and reason in college are skills that are highly valued by college professors; however, research among college professors asserts that students come to college least prepared in these areas (Collier & Morgan, 2007). It could be argued that the deficiency in this area stems from the differences in demands for these skills between high school and college. Conley purports that the reading, writing and reasoning requirements specific to college courses typically do not correspond to what students have been required to do in high school (Conley, 2007). Seldom, if ever, would a high school student be required to read greater than five or six books over the course of a 15 week period, yet that is a common practice in college courses (Conley, 2003).

Academic Behaviors. Academic behaviors most associated with success are found in two overarching themes, self-monitoring and study skills. These constructs encompass a range of attributes that exemplify a student's self-awareness, self-monitoring and self-control (Conley, 2007). As well as their adeptness in preparing for and taking tests, managing their time, taking notes in class, using their advisors, communicating with professors and effective use of study groups (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Conley, 2003; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004). Self-monitoring represents the crucial ability of a student to negotiate through a course independently and assess their competency of the subject matter (Wiley et al., 2010). They must be able to identify where they have gaps in the content knowledge and how to improve in any particular academic task. These developmental requirements require the acquisition of new behavioral, problem-solving and coping skills that facilitate the transition into the social and academic demands of college (Roderick et al., 2009; Collier & Morgan, 2008).

College knowledge, the last facet to be discussed, reveals the information and resources that students need in order to access college. The college admissions process, especially the processes of applying for financial aid, has been described extensively as a barrier to the postsecondary environment, especially for underrepresented students (Roderick et al., 2009; Reid & Moore, 2008; Collier & Morgan, 2008). While the process of applying to college may be a challenge for many students, first generation college attenders, who do not have the benefit of parental experience in this area, are often the most disadvantaged in this area (Reid & Moore, 2008; Choy, 2001; Warburton et al., 2001). How students come to know and understand the necessary steps to take regarding

collection selection, admissions, financing their education and the college culture may very well be tied to their access and utilization of social capital. Social capital is an asset which is rooted in social relations (Bordieu, 1985; Coleman, 1999; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Lee & Croninger, 1999) and which has the potential to increase and or improve life outcomes for individuals. For students from underrepresented demographic groups, access to social networks and relationships within those networks may be the difference between their being able to go to college or not, irrespective of their academic abilities.

In a 2009 study conducted by Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca on college readiness in urban high school students, the authors provide compelling evidence that a lack of college knowledge accounts for some portion of the disparity in college readiness by income, and race/ethnicity. They also suggest that improved college knowledge may be of particular relevance in the high school reform movement. The early college high school initiative is poised to effectively address this issue of improving a student's college knowledge prior to their enrollment in the traditional college environment. Early college programs from their very first interaction with their students convey high expectations for college. Additionally, early college students are enrolled in college courses on college campuses sometimes as early as the 7th grade, thereby providing practical real-life experience of what it means to meet college expectations and to learn college culture (Nodine, 2009)

Improving college readiness must continue to have prominence in the educational reform arena. All students, including those who upon graduating from high school may opt to enter the workforce instead of attending college, must leave high school confident

in their ability to succeed academically and socially in a postsecondary environment. To meet the 2020 national education goals, there can be no hesitancy in our efforts to support high schools with implementing strategies proven to improve college readiness competencies and skills. While there are many high school reform efforts currently focused on increased access and success for traditionally underrepresented students, the early college school model is the focus of this study and stands to make a significant contribution towards helping our country to reach this goal.

Early College Strategies, Social Capital, and College Readiness

The ECHSI is designed to help underrepresented students navigate and overcome system barriers to higher education. When schools employ the following strategies they have a greater likelihood of bridging the divide between high school and college: providing guidance and support from adults for the first 2 years of college; facilitating the transition to higher education for motivated students; and developing the flexibility to integrate individualized levels of learning that will better serve the intellectual and developmental needs of the students (JFF, 2002). To facilitate effective challenges and successful outcomes for students, early college high school implementers must rethink traditional curriculum sequences, find creative ways to align and connect high school and college experiences, and provide the academic and social supports students need to succeed in an intensive early college program of study (JFF).

The initiative stresses that the “New 3 Rs” – Relevance, Rigor, and Relationship, which must be prevalent and prominent within schools. Historically, the 3 Rs were commonly referred to as “Reading, ‘Riting, and ‘Rithmetic” and they formulated the foundation upon which these new concepts are based. Figure 3, adapted from

Tomlinson's framework (1999) on differentiated instruction, represents the triangular relationship on which the original three Rs are built and how they connect to the new concepts.

Tomlinson reasons that relevance and rigor are obvious components. In order for students to reach their full potential and demonstrate conceptual understanding they must have a rigorous curriculum, and when the subject matter is relevant to the student they are much more likely to embrace the rigor of the curriculum and persist to meet their goals. She further states that the subtlety of the relationships is more nebulous then the other two. Relationships actually undergird the effectiveness of both relevance and rigor. She proposes that teachers have a special relationship with the subjects they teach, and because they are teaching something that matters to them they want to share the subject with their students in a way that is rigorous and relevant. Students also have a

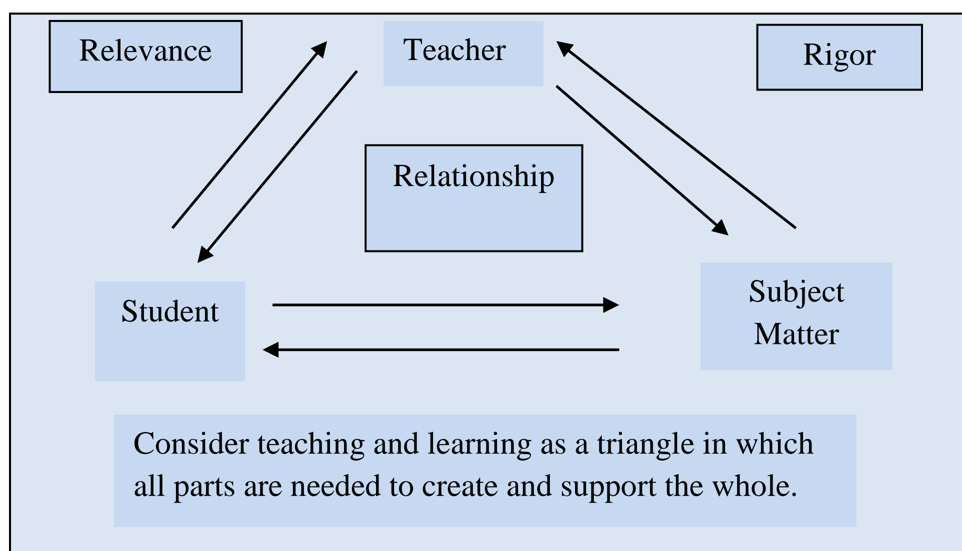

Figure 3. Relationship of old 3 Rs and New 3 Rs. Adapted from Tomlinson (1999).

relationship with the subject matter and when they have a connection with that subject they understand the importance of the rigor to support their mastery of the topic. Finally, perhaps the most important relationship is between the student and teacher. When teachers and students have relationships that are nurturing, respectful and personal, a reciprocal exchange occurs where the teacher's passion for the subject matter is imparted to the student and the teacher receives satisfaction as the student builds relationship with the rigor and relevance of the subject matter.

To combat against disengaged and unmotivated students, the initiative has focused on promoting the benefits of a high school curriculum that is relevant and rigorous; and that adults in the school understand the importance of developing supportive relationships.

Student teacher relationships that involve high expectations, respect, responsibility, and personalization contribute most effectively to a college-going culture in high school (AIR/SRI, 2006). Additionally the benefits that students may reap through meaningful relationships with school personnel may well pay off in the access to information that will contribute to their increased "College Knowledge." Teachers, counselors, administrators, and higher education partners are all considered institutional agents capable of impacting the amount of social capital a student can acquire (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). As previously stated in the review of social capital theory, schools and other social organizations through their networks and relationships play a significant role in transmitting social capital to students. Relationships are key in the transmission of social capital. Unlike human and economic capital, which are tangible assets, social capital is inherent in the relationships of people (Coleman, 1988).

Schools are also strongly encouraged to ensure that instruction is both rigorous and relevant. Rigorous instruction expects that students will (1) build upon existing knowledge and skills to create or explore new ideas; (2) demonstrate conceptual understanding of important content; (3) organize, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information; (4) communicate clearly and well; and (5) revise work based on informative feedback (AIR/SRI, 2009, p. 29) When students receive instruction that stimulates their abilities to think deeply about the subject matter, they will engage the skills that are required to be successful in college. Relevant instruction is directly related to how students can gain proficiency in the first two facets of college readiness framework, "Key Cognitive Strategies and Content Knowledge." Active inquiry and in-depth learning will help to develop and hone the habits of the mind, as well as increase a student's knowledge base about the content.

"Relevant learning opportunities ask students to address questions or problems with real-world applications, make choices about what they will study and how they will study it, and take on plausible roles and submit their work to real audiences (AIR/SRI, 2005)." Early college teachers are encouraged to allow students to participate in the learning process by giving them some latitude in deciding what they will study and how they will study it. When students have the opportunity to make choices based on their interests and likes, they are more likely to be engaged in the work. Promoting relevance in the curriculum supports the development of the noncognitive academic behaviors related to college readiness. Students who are active in their learning process are also learning more about themselves and actualizing self-awareness and self-monitoring.

When they take ownership for how they will study, they also have to take ownership of managing their time and developing the study habits that will ensure their success.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the prevailing scholarship in three areas germane to this study: early college schools, social capital theory and educational research, and college readiness. The interconnectedness of these three bodies of literature provides the context for exploring the perspectives and experiences of students who have participated in an early college high school and sought to transition into the traditional postsecondary environment. Chapter 3 also draws upon the context of Chapter 2 as I describe the study methodology, including the specifics of qualitative inquiry, study participants, data collection, data coding and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education is a complex experience for many high school students. This transition may present a more complex problem for students who have traditionally been underrepresented in postsecondary institutions (Bedolla, 2010; Furstenberg, 1995; Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2008). Postsecondary success for students requires not just rigorous academic preparation but also a strong social support network (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Understanding the dimensions and attributes that influence postsecondary success for these students requires a robust inquiry that will capitalize on the strength of a research design that privileges the participants and their perspectives. With that intent in mind, the use of qualitative research, research that at its philosophical foundation seeks to understand how people construct reality and make meaning of their worlds and the experiences within that world (Merriam, 1998), was the best fit for this study.

The purpose of this case study was to investigate early college high school students' perceptions of their high school experience. Particular attention was given to the students' perceptions of how effective Early College strategies were in preparing them to succeed academically and socially in the postsecondary environment. The research design follows the tenets of qualitative research utilizing individual interviews, focus groups, student academic data and document review as the methods of data collection. This chapter reviews the methodology of the study beginning with the research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were as follows:

1. What are early college students' perceptions, as dual enrollment students regarding their high school experiences?
2. How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success?
3. How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

Methodological Framework

Qualitative Research

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) purport that qualitative research is concerned with how people make sense of their lives. Qualitative research, as compared to positivistic research, focuses more on theory generating than on theory testing. In a qualitative study, the researcher does not seek out evidence to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis; instead, as Bogden and Biklen (2003) assert, the hypotheses are built as data is gathered and analyzed.

Merriam (1998) describes a "basic or generic qualitative study" as one that exemplifies the characteristics of qualitative research. These characteristics are (a) an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective and not the researcher's; (b) the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection; (c) involving fieldwork; (d) employing an inductive research strategy; and (e) producing a report or findings that are richly descriptive. She goes on to state that "researchers who

conduct basic or generic qualitative studies, which are probably the most common form of qualitative research in education, simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). In this study, I used case study methods to explore the perspectives of early college students, as dual enrollment students in high school and in the traditional postsecondary environment following high school.

Yin (2003) describes a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Merriam (1998) further states that qualitative case studies "can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (p. 29). Case studies are particularistic in that they focus on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. In this study, the focus was on one class of early college high school students. The case study is descriptive when it offers details and "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomenon under study, such as what was expressed by the participants of this study who shared their perspectives on how their early college high school experience prepared them to be successful postsecondary students. Finally, case studies are heuristic in that they contribute to new meanings of a situation or possibly confirm what is already known. The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the early college principles and strategies affected college readiness skills in the study participants.

One of the defining characteristics of case study research that differentiates it from other types of qualitative research is that it is the study of a bounded system (Yin, 2003). The bounded system can be a person, a group, an intervention, or a program and

there is a limit to the number of people who can be interviewed or observed. The case is specific to what is being studied and not the topic of investigation. A case is a single entity around which there are intrinsic boundaries that allow the researcher to examine functioning (Stake, 2005). The case in this study included 34 students in the first graduating class from an urban early college high school in the southeastern United States.

Qualitative Interviewing

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that "qualitative interviews and ordinary conversations share much in common" (p. 12). Just like the conversations we have on a daily basis, answers follow questions and people take turns talking to each other. Rubin and Rubin also referred to study participants who respond to interview questions as "conversational partners." I see this term as an esteemed acknowledgment of the role that participants play in contributing to the study. They are partners in the process of creating the evidence that documents their experience. Both the interviewer and the interviewee are working together to create "a shared understanding" (p.14). Conversational partnerships may be between one interviewer and one interviewee or between the interviewer and a group of interviewees, as in the case of focus groups.

Yin (2003) stated that "one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview" (p. 89). Merriam (1998) substantiated the interview's importance by asserting that interviews are the most common qualitative tool used in the field of education. Qualitative interviewing with individuals and/or groups is used to gather information that cannot be obtained by other methods (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). This study used both individual interviews and focus groups to gather an in-depth and

descriptive understanding of how the early college students perceived their high school preparation for college. Focus groups capitalize on the use of small numbers of respondents who interact with one another in a "particular concrete situation" (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007, p. 9). The use of focus groups in this study provided an opportunity to explore the range of multiple perspectives held by early college students regarding their high school experiences as dual enrollment students.

Study Propositions

Yin (1998) suggested that the stating of propositions in a case study will facilitate directing attention to what should be studied within the scope of the study. Propositions--statements that express what we believe, doubt, affirm or deny about our study (Schwandt, 1997)--differ from research questions in that they force the researcher to be purposeful about what questions need to be asked. The two propositions that guided the investigation of this study derived from the literature on college readiness and social capital theory.

The first proposition related to college readiness was that early college students would report positive perceptions of their college readiness skills as a result of their early college experience. While college readiness has traditionally been defined primarily in terms of high school courses taken, grades earned, and scores on national tests, recent research (Conley, 2007) has identified key elements associated with cognitive and meta-cognitive skills that reflect a better assessment of college readiness. Conley proposed that college readiness is a "multi-faceted concept comprising numerous variables that include factors both internal and external to the school environment" (p. 12). He defined "college readiness" as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—

without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 5). He further explained that to succeed in this context is to ensure that a student completes the entry-level courses with the proficiency and understanding necessary to transition to the next course in the sequence or the next level of course in the subject area. This study was designed to examine the students' perceptions of their college readiness through the lens of Conley's framework, as described in Chapter 2, focusing on the four key facets of college readiness: key cognitive skills, knowledge of academic content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills/awareness.

The second proposition that guided this research was that early college students would report that participation in the early college program provided information related to access and transition to postsecondary institutions. This proposition is derived from Coleman's (1988) model of social capital. Coleman purported that there are three types of social capital: (1) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures, (2) information channels, and (3) norms and sanctions. While all three might have had an impact on this study, the one which was of primary concern to me at the outset was information channels. Coleman shared that information is a natural and integral part of social relations and networks and that the acquisition of information is important for providing the basis for some subsequent action.

Linking Data to Propositions

The following sources of evidence served as the primary means of accumulating data for this study: focus groups, individual interviews, document analysis, and student

academic data. Table 2 shows the ways in which the research questions, propositions, and sources of data were aligned.

The Research Setting

The research setting for this case included an urban high school where the students were enrolled from 2005-2009 and the urban research university where the students completed their dual-enrollment coursework from 2007-2009. As explained in Chapter 1, Early College High Schools are unique partnerships between a local school system and an institution of higher education. These partnerships are typically governed by memorandums of understandings that outline the responsibilities of each partner in relation to facilitating a seamless transition for early college students between the secondary and postsecondary institutions. In this case study, the research setting involved the students' experiences at both the high school and the university.

Urban Early College High School

Urban Early College High School has the distinction of being the first early college high school in the state in which it is located and also being one of the first high schools in its district to undergo transformation into a small learning community. The school was initially established in the mid-twentieth century as a comprehensive trade and vocational school servicing middle-class high school students from the district. Eventually, the school was zoned as the home school for a 990-unit public housing project. Over time, the area began to transform from a thriving middle-class neighborhood to an area plagued by poverty and crime. As the socioeconomic status of the area declined, so did indicators reflecting student achievement for the school. Between 1999 and 2003, student performance in core academic areas as well as on

Table 2

Alignment of Questions, Propositions, and Methods

Research Question	Proposition	Research Method
What are early college students' perceptions regarding their high school experience?		Focus groups; individual interviews;
How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success as dual-enrollment students?	Early college students will report positive perceptions of their dual-enrollment college readiness skills as a result of their early college experiences.	Focus groups; individual interviews;
How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of college readiness and access to social support	Early college students will report that participation in the early college program provided information related to access and transition to postsecondary institutions. Early college students will describe positive perceptions of their college readiness skills in the traditional postsecondary environment.	Individual interviews

national and state assessments, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the State High School Graduation exam, consistently lagged behind the scores of the district. These trends ultimately resulted in the school being designated as needing a restructured/-redesigned academic program.

In 2003, the school was a comprehensive high school of approximately 650 students where only 34% of the students graduated. Forty percent of the school's students were either dropping out of high school or turning to private schools. The school was to

be closed permanently. However, in 2004, under the leadership of a new school superintendent, the failing school underwent a $40 million physical restoration resulting in a single high school campus that would ultimately host four small high schools. In 2005, the new campus opened with five small high schools to accommodate the students who were enrolled prior to the transformation of the campus. Those students were juniors in 2005 and by the end of the 2007 school year, the fifth high school would be phased out. The schools shared common resources, such as the library, physical education center and athletic teams; however, each had its own principal and administration. The student capacity at each school, with the exception of the one that was to be phased out, would be no more than 400 students per school. The Urban Early College High School was one of the four new schools on the campus and operated in a unique partnership with a four-year institution of higher education, Urban Public Research University. While each school had a different theme, all had the common goals to increase college readiness and improve high school graduation rates.

The partnership between Urban Early College High School and its institution of higher education was built on (a) seven success elements of redesign efforts identified by the school system, (b) the principles of the early college model, and (c) the belief that intellectual challenge and academic rigor are better motivators for students to work hard in high school than remediation and repetition. Funded by a start-up grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the early college partnership was just one of several initiatives between the school district and the university, which sought to develop stronger academic leaders, quality teachers, and high achieving students.

As the first early college high school in the state, Urban Early College High School had the distinction of being the test case for the other five early colleges slated to open the following school year in the same state. The promise of the school and its unique model caused it to draw significant attention from state, local and national policy makers.

As previously stated, when the school was redesigned, it was done so on the small school/learning community model. The students in this study were the first class of students at the school and according to the State Department of Education, 99 students were enrolled at early college that first year and 100% of the students were African American. Slightly over half of the students were male (n = 52) and 75% of the students received free or reduced-price lunch. By the 2008-2009 academic year, there was a total school enrollment of 333 students: 96% were Black/African American, 2% were Hispanic and 2% were multiracial. Eighty percent of the students received free or reduced-price lunch (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=102& CountyId=761&PID=62&PTID=213&T=1&FY=2009, retrieved 02/11/2010).

Over the 4-year period that these students were enrolled in high school, two years were spent as dual enrollment students at the partner university. Over the course of their time in the program these students had the unique experience of navigating both the culture of the secondary institution and the postsecondary institution simultaneously. The policies and practices of the early college model were designed to provide academic and social supports that would serve as a bridge from the secondary to the postsecondary environment, both during and after high school.

Urban Public Research University

The partner university for Urban Early College High School is located within close proximity to the high school. It is a large urban research university that has a long history of partnering with the school district in which Urban Early College High school is located. Key faculty and personnel from the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences at Urban Public Research University were a part of the planning and implementation team for the high school. In the implementation plan for the Early College Initiative, the university agreed to support the physical growth, recreational needs, and social development needs of the high school students through the use of campus facilities, such as auxiliary and support services, student health services, freshmen learning communities, and the student recreation center. In addition to the use of key facilities on campus, the university also committed financial support in the form of teacher professional development for the high school teachers and partnerships with university faculty and students to support tutoring, mentoring and advisement services for the high school students.

Participants

The students were enrolled in the early college program from 2005-2009. This was the first early college high school program in the state, and these students represented the first class of students to matriculate through the program. There were 79 students recruited to participate in the study, and 34 of these returned a consent form. From the pool of 34 students, 24 students participated in focus groups (3 groups with 8-10 participants per group). All 34 students were scheduled to participate in the focus groups; however, because of scheduling conflicts, only 24 actually participated. From the

24 focus group participants, I recruited a purposeful sample of 13 students to participate in the semistructured individual interviews. Students for the sample were selected based on the following criteria: (a) the number of college credits attempted, (b) their first-generation college attender status, and (c) their plans to attend a traditional postsecondary institution in the fall following high school graduation. I chose these criteria based on factors directly related to the early college program. By selecting students who had attempted at least 3 college credits as a dual-enrollment student, I ensured that a student would have the requisite experience to describe how prepared they felt to be successful at the university as an early college high school student. The early college model is targeted to assist students who are minority, English language-learners, low-income, and/or first-generation college attenders. Given that 100% of the students were African American, none were English-language learners, and 75% were receiving free or reduced-price lunch, it was important to ensure that the perspectives of the first-generation students were also represented in the study. The final criterion was that students planned on attending some postsecondary institution within 6-8 months of graduating from high school. This was important as the second-part of the interviewing phase was scheduled to occur following the completion of the students' first year as a traditional college student.

Participant Profiles

Based on the sampling criteria previously discussed, 13 students were selected and agreed to participate in the individual interviewing phase of the study. Their demographic data are presented in Table 3. Of particular interest from the table was that eight students had earned 20 or more college credits prior to high school graduation. The research suggests that students who earn at least 20 college credits are more likely to earn

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Name	First Generation	No. of College Credits Attempted/Earned	When Enrolled in traditional postsecondary institution	Enrolled in college at the time of the 2nd interview
Dianna	Yes	35/29	Fall 2009	Yes
Dennis	Yes	29/18	N/A	N/A
Mary-Francis	Yes	26/20	N/A	N/A
Angel	Yes	37/28	Spr. 2010	Yes
Flora	No	25/25	Fall 2009	Yes
Damien	Yes	41/38	Fall 2009	Yes
Horatio	Yes	27/15	Fall 2009	No
Monte	Yes	37/28	Fall 2009	Yes
Ibrahim	Yes	9/3	N/A	N/A
Kenneth	Yes	27/12	Fall 2009	No
Eric	Yes	17/8	Fall 2009	No
Shannon	No	41/38	Fall 2009	Yes
Kandi	Yes	26/20	N/A	N/A

a college degree (Adelman, 2006). Of the nine students who attended college within a year of high school graduation, three transferred from the first college they attended to another institution, and three were currently not enrolled in college, either because of emotional stress, lack of financial support, or academic probation. College GPAs prior to high school graduation for the participants ranged from 0.50-2.93 (Mean = 1.75).

In the interest of preserving the anonymity of the participants, a pseudonym was used for each student. However, because some identifying information has been

provided, it is possible that someone may be identified. Reasonable efforts have been applied to prevent that from occurring.

Researcher Role

I have been employed at Urban Early College High School as the college liaison since the school began operations in 2005. While I was not a member of the formal school administration or the instructional faculty, I did play a supportive role in the selection of students who would attend the university, the registration of the students, course selections, and provision of academic supports, such as tutors and advocacy with college faculty. The college liaison plays a pivotal role in that this person coordinates the partnership between the high school and their college partner facilitating as seamless a transition as possible to the postsecondary institution for the early college students.

My responsibilities required me to work very closely with the teachers, students, parents, administrators and university personnel who were involved with the project. My own perceptions and attitudes about early college were shaped by my duties as the early college liaison and by the conceptual model as put forth nationally by the Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future. It is an important and complicated intersection where concept meets practicality. As a person in a position to influence how the model was actually implemented and as a researcher, I felt tremendous (self-imposed) pressure to balance the practical with the theoretical.

It is difficult to clearly assign myself to one category of observer as described in Merriam's (1988) typology; however, it seems plausible that my role vacillated between the complete participant and the participant-observer over the course of the time I was at the school. When I began working at the high school, I did not intend to conduct research

there. My role was as a complete participant functioning in the day-to-day operations of the school. As a result of my own personal proclivities, I kept a journal of my daily activities and reflections, some of which described my actions and observations at the school. I also had access to the many memos and communications from the school administration that guided the work of the school over the first couple of years. Until I made the decision to conduct my dissertation research at the school, my observations were strictly for the purposes of gathering information that would contribute to assisting the students with a successful transition to college, not for the purposes of research.

During my tenure at the school in addition to my administrative duties as the college liaison, I also nurtured and cared for the students on their journey to be the first graduating class in their state from an early college high school. I was a part of the administration that implored them to intuitively accept the responsibility of being the legacy class and to embrace the challenges of mastering high school and college at the same time. There was a lot of pressure for the students to be successful.

At the end of one full year of joint enrollment status for the majority of the students, there was a variety of academic outcomes among the students, and it was very hard to determine why some students were able to succeed at passing all of the high school and college courses they had taken and others were not. During informal debriefing sessions with the students at the end of both the fall and spring semesters, a multitude of observations, attitudes and perceptions were voiced by the students. While the voices of the students were heard by the high school administration and the university coordinators, there was still no organized and purposeful investigation designed to understand what strategies and principles of the early college model were contributing to

the success or impediment of the students. Personally, I wanted to know what it was that gave some students the ability or motivation to succeed while others met with negative outcomes for which they were not prepared.

I experienced many of the students' successes and failures at the same emotional level as a biological parent would have. My two youngest children were early college students and, while they were excluded from the study, their experiences as students and my experience as an administrator and facilitator of the process would certainly influence my inquiry throughout this process.

Positionality

When conducting qualitative research, the role of the researcher as an instrument of data collection requires the researcher to identify his or her own personal values, assumptions and biases that may contribute and shape the way in which the data are interpreted (Yin, 2003). By using reflective techniques such as writing memos, journal-ing, and visualizing my subjectivities, I was able to begin to identify how my personal feelings and biases may have influenced this study.

As an African American, Christian woman, my positionality had a significant impact on why the students in my study felt comfortable with me and agreed to participate in the study. Most of the students trusted me and saw me, at times, as a surrogate mother. My relationship with the students and their parents often intersected in personal spaces, and my advocacy for the students oftentimes extended beyond the academic environment. That relationship may traditionally have be seen as a violation of professional boundaries, but Guiffrida (2005) points out that in a review of Black feminist literature these types of relationships between educators and students are quite

common. In his study of “othermothering” as a framework for understanding African American college student’s success and retention, he shares the development of this concept as put forth by Patricia Hill-Collins (2000). According to Collins, “othermothering” was a practice by which slave women often had to mother other slave women’s children because of the death or sale of a biological mother. In addition, the practice of “othermothering” was also extended to women who could not afford to care for their children or who were not intellectually capable of providing mothering to their children. In many ways, this practice is relevant in contemporary times during which educated and professional African Americans reach back and guide the children of parents who may not have the resources and experiences to facilitate a successful and productive transition to college for their own children. This concept of giving back resonates with me as one who recognizes that much of my own experience with going to college came through the use of the social capital inherent within the social networks of friends, acquaintances and biological and fictive kin of my parents who were college graduates. Upon my graduation from high school, neither of my parents had graduated from college, and they were not knowledgeable of the college application process. Were it not for this access to “others” within my community, I might not have been able to navigate the cumbersome applications of college and financial aid. In the context of understanding college readiness and specifically the aspect of college knowledge, I was able to recognize how having access to resources and information allowed me to continue my education beyond high school. It was through my own acquisition and use of social capital that I have been placed in a position to guide, mentor and facilitate a new generation into college. That realization was life changing for me.

My Christian beliefs also framed my sense of responsibility to the students that I worked with at early college. *Luke 12:48* reads, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask more” (NKJV). The context of this passage speaks to the belief that I am accountable for the knowledge, resources and abilities that I have been endowed with. The Creator does not and did not expect for me to harbor those talents selfishly but to share my blessings with others in a way that is and was meaningful and fruitful. As He brought to my remembrance the measure with which others had accommodated me, I saw the opportunity to reciprocate and shepherd, if you will, these students into their new experiences. I am convinced that it was my genuine commitment to their success that created a rapport of care and trust with the students at early college. In addition, I believe that because their success, and not my research, was my first priority, when the opportunity for them to participate in the study was presented to them, the majority of the students agreed.

Trust, respect and genuine care were the foundation upon which I built my relationships with the students at early college. These key aspects of relationships were also identified as pivotal constructs upon which a guiding theoretical principle of the early college model was built. Without healthy and trustworthy relationships, the students were less likely to access the necessary instruction and information that would prepare them academically and socially to persist onto the postsecondary environment. Relationships are integral to the exchange of social capital between a student and those in his or her network, and it was through this lens that I examined and interpreted my data. As I stated in Chapter 2, the acquisition of social capital through information channels can

serve to greatly improve academic outcomes for students and in addition to myself, there were a host of other early college agents (i.e., teachers, college faculty, peers, family, and community organizations) uniquely positioned to share their information, resources, and knowledge with the students. My own experience coupled with a need to understand better how the model was perceived by the students who participated in the program combined to motivate me to design a study that would examine student perceptions of their early college experience particularly in regards to their college readiness skills, using social capital theory as a theoretical framework.

Negotiating Access

To negotiate entrée into the research setting, I first had to understand my reasons for wanting to conduct research at this site and how my relationships with the students might affect my research. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) point out that the relationship the researcher has with their subjects and what that means to the researcher affects how one conducts fieldwork and interprets the data. As is the case with many teachers and principals who seek doctoral degrees while maintaining employment, conducting the study at the site where I worked would prove to be the most convenient and expeditious way to obtain the data that was needed. Yet convenience had to be secondary to a more important factor, that of ensuring that the students would not feel any coercion to participate in the study. Ensuring that I had thought through the ramifications of conducting research at a site where I worked along with developing a data collection plan that would be the least disruptive and as unobtrusive as possible were the first steps to negotiating access to the site.

There were a number of gatekeepers that had to be approached in order to conduct my research: (a) the high school principal, (b) the institutional review board at the school district, and (c) the institutional review board of the partner university. The school principal was very protective of her students and I knew that if she did not see a direct benefit for the students and an opportunity for the school administration and instructional staff to learn valuable information from the study she would not support the project. In this regard, I made an appointment with her to review my research proposal and answered all of her questions regarding the data collection plan and she granted me permission to conduct the study.

To combat the issue of coercion with the students, we agreed that I would author a letter requesting the students to participate in the study and that the students' advisors would read the letter to them during the advisement period and then distribute the consent and assent forms. Students were advised verbally and in the letter that they were not required to participate in the study. Participation was completely voluntary and if they elected to participate they should return the signed consent and assent forms. By using the advisors to share the information about the study, I sought to reduce any pressure the students might feel regarding talking to me directly.

Separate institutional review board (IRB) proposals were completed for the school district and for the university. Parental informed consent was requested from all students under the age of 18. Most of the students had already reached their 18th birthday and did not require parental consent. For those students who did require parental consent, student assent was also obtained. Students without appropriate consent were not included in the study.

The research requirements that were stipulated by the school district prohibited any form of audio or video-taping of the students. Because the focus groups and some initial interviews were being conducted while the students were still enrolled in high school and under the authority of the school system, the original IRB request to both the school district and the university specified that there would be no audio or video-taping of any of the students. The study proposal was submitted to the IRBs at both the university and the school district where the students attended high school. The school district approval had to be granted before the university proposal could be ruled on. Both proposals were approved. A subsequent amendment to the university IRB was submitted after the students graduated from high school and had enrolled in a traditional college, requesting permission to audio-tape the follow-up interviews. This request was made because the participants were no longer under the auspices of the school district. The amendment was approved.

Data Collection

The use of multiple sources of evidence is seen as a strength when conducting case studies (Yin, 2003). The triangulation of data provides an opportunity for the researcher to confirm emerging findings (Merriam, 1998) and to develop lines of inquiry (Yin) within the study. In order to provide an accurate account of the perspectives of the early college students, the primary source of data came from individual interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were essential aspects of the study as the students' voices were very important to my data collection efforts. Additionally, I examined academic data, such as high school GPA and college GPA, to describe the case from a traditional college readiness perspective. Finally, I collected early college

documents to examine policies and practices specifically designed to target college readiness skills for early college students.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Data collection for this study involved three focus groups with 8-10 students per group. The focus groups were held at the high school during a designated time approved by the principal of the school. Each focus group lasted between 60-90 minutes. Audio-taping of the focus groups was prohibited by the school system, and so I enlisted a colleague to act as a note taker and I made use of butcher block paper to document notes at the front of the room as the focus groups were being conducted. The focus group interview guide (Appendix B) used to assist in facilitating the group asked general questions related to early college practices and to their early college experience. While focus groups are more about group process than individual in-depth understanding, the data from the focus groups allowed me to develop more specific questions for the individual interviews.

The 13 students selected to participate in the individual interviews were those from the focus groups who agreed to participate in an individual interview and met the sampling criteria based on the number of college credits they attempted, their first generation attender status, and their intent to enroll in a postsecondary institution upon graduation from high school. The initial interviews took place on the weekends and after school over the last few months of the students' senior year. They typically ranged in length between 45-60 minutes. These interviews also were not audio taped. Instead, I relied on note-taking during and after the interview and my own audio-taped reflections of the interview after it was complete.

Second interviews were scheduled following the students' completion of at least one academic year in the traditional college setting. Of the original 13 students interviewed, 4 never enrolled in a postsecondary institution, so they were not interviewed a second time. Of the remaining 9 students, 8 interviews were conducted face-to-face, and 1 interview was conducted by phone. The students were contacted via email, phone, and Facebook to schedule their follow-up interviews. A transcript of their initial interview, a synopsis of my initial findings, and a new consent form requesting permission to audio-tape the second interview were provided either prior to or on the day of the second interview. All participants signed new consent forms agreeing to be audio-taped for the interview. The second interviews were between 45-60 minutes in length.

Document Review

I analyzed three significant planning documents to gain a better understanding of the policies and procedures that were originally designed to target college readiness skills for early college students. These documents included the original grant proposal submitted to the intermediary agency responsible for governing the early college initiative in the state; the implementation proposal as presented by the school system following award notification of the early college grant and; the memorandum of understanding agreed upon by the university partner and the school system. A review of these documents helped to inform the study regarding which services and policies were actually implemented.

Memos and Reflections

Throughout the data collection process, I wrote memos and reflections to document my personal thoughts, concerns and questions. Through the use of observer

comments and memos within my transcripts and my personal dissertation diary, I was able to document “the more subjective side” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114) of my study. Reflection during the study serves the purpose of helping the researcher to maintain an accurate record of their procedures, methods, and analysis; it also assists the researcher with maintaining his/her awareness of his/her relationship with the setting and participants (Bogdan & Biklen). Being reflective is a natural process for me. I have long kept personal journals to record my personal and professional journey in life. Because I was so intricately involved in the implementation of the early college program it was essential for me to use written reflections to examine my feelings, motives, concerns, disagreements, mistakes and inadequacies throughout this process.

Data Management

The first and most important step in the data analysis process is a well thought out data management plan. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) offer “Some Friendly Advice” specific to data management: “Pledge to keep your data physically well-organized, develop a plan about how you are going to do it, and live up to your vow” (p.110). My data management plan involved ensuring that all of my data were maintained and organized physically as well as electronically. The physical documents that were collected were scanned to create an electronic record and also maintained in a filing cabinet. The academic data for each participant was provided in the form of an excel spreadsheet and maintained electronically on my password-protected computer. All original handwritten notes and butcher block paper from the first round of individual interviews and focus groups were maintained in a storage cabinet in my office. In addition, the handwritten notes were transcribed electronically by myself and then printed out in a hard copy. Included in my

notes were my observer comments and memos that evolved as I typed and reflected on the interview. Finally, I have audio recordings of my reflections following interviews I did with students when I was not able to audio-tape their interviews, as well as audiotapes of all of the second interviews. All audio-recordings have been transcribed and are stored electronically along with all the other electronic data in three separate places, on my password-protected computer, on a dissertation specific jump drive which is locked in a file cabinet, and on a password-protected external hard drive.

Data Analysis

The act of data analysis involves a number of processes that guides the researcher in making sense out of his or her data. Fetterman (1998) described analysis as a test of the researcher's ability to think, to be able to process information in a meaningful and useful way. It can also be described as a cyclical process of analyzing (taking the data apart), synthesizing (putting it together differently), and finally theorizing to contribute to the end result of the research, a case study report that contributes knowledge and information to your field of study. In the early stages of the research process, I made a number of mistakes in my research design and data collection processes, so I tried to be as systematic as possible in conducting my analysis. As previously described, I transcribed and visually reviewed my data from the interviews and focus groups. I then organized the data by type: focus group notes, interview transcriptions, documents and academic data.

While all of my data had been scanned electronically, my initial attempt at coding was with hard copies of each focus group and interview transcript. Initial analysis took place with the focus group interviews. I examined the data for recurring patterns, especially the way participants described things in a similar matter, but also how they

described things differently (Saladaña, 2009). The data from the focus group interviews provided insights into the collective experience of those focus group participants, but also enabled me to develop a semi-structured individual interview protocol to examine certain issues from an individual perspective.

Another important step was to make sure that I had read all of my data thoroughly. Merriam (1998) asserts that the right way to do data analysis is to make sure that it is concurrent with data collection. In doing so, I read and re-read transcripts and written memos as a part of the data collection process. After data collection was complete, I conducted a more purposeful content analysis of the data, intended to provide a general sense of the data and to reflect on the overall meaning of it all. Content analysis has historically been seen as a quantitative approach to analyzing and enumerating words, recurring patterns and themes in a qualitative data set (Merriam, 1998). It systematically allows the researcher to condense the data into smaller segments by creating categories and/or themes, while also providing a numeric account of words or patterns in the data. Using post-it notes, colored-markers, and a spreadsheet to organize, highlight and code words, phrases and other chunks of data, this first-cycle open coding of the data allowed me to categorize the data and become intimately engaged with it. This manual process was exceptionally helpful to me as it capitalized on my visual and reader/writer learning styles. It enabled me to create a mental and physical database of codes and categories that I was able to arrange and rearrange a number of times both on paper and in my mind. However, the manual process of keeping track of the codes in the spreadsheet became unwieldy so I sought the use of a qualitative software package.

Atlas.ti: The Knowledge Workbench®

I purchased and began using the qualitative software program, Atlas.ti: The Knowledge Workbench V.6.0. Atlas.ti was originally developed at the Technical University of Berlin in 1989. Not long after1989, further program development was undertaken by Thomas Muhr and the Scientific Software Development GMbH. In a 1991 article on computer assisted support of text interpretation Muhr stated,

> Atlas/ti is designed to offer qualitative oriented social researchers support for their activities involving the interpretation of texts. This includes the capacity to deal with large amounts of text as well as management of annotations, concepts and complex structures including conceptual relationships that emerge in the process of interpretation. (p.2)

Since the 1980s, there has been continued growth in the development of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CADQAS) (Banner & Albarran, 2009; Fielding & Lee, 2002). While early versions of qualitative software programs such as NUD*IST and The Ethnograph enabled researchers to visualize their data and ease the management of large data sets, the continued innovation in software development has resulted in more sophisticated software packages that facilitate theory-building, file sharing between investigators and enhanced coding. Despite the increased use of CADQAS, it is important to note that while software can help facilitate better management of data and provide networks that enable the researcher to visualize relationships, it does not replace the creative and critical thinking processes that are vital to the interpretation of the data (Banner & Albarran, 2009).

Using Atlas.ti, I was able to analyze all of my interview and focus group transcripts as well as documents. The functionality of the software enabled me to code and manage all of my data in one place. Atlas.ti allowed me to use different coding

methods, including open coding and in vivo coding. While I had done that manually, conducting this third and fourth round of coding in the software allowed me to create manageable network webs (See Appendix F) that enabled me to visualize the connectedness of codes and categories. Additionally, I was able to assign memos and notes to codes and categories, which enhanced my reflexivity and did not interrupt the flow of analysis by having to switch from one word processing document to another. With the help of the software program, I was able to generate codes from the interviews, focus groups and documents. From the codes that were created, I was then able to engage in axial coding, a process by where a more focused analysis is given to the codes and they are combined to generate themes (See Appendix G). I searched for codes that were common among the participants as well as examined codes that represented a larger overarching theme into which other codes could be linked.

Once the above processes were completed, the task of determining how best to represent the data was at hand. Representation of the findings can occur in various forms including: visuals, figures, tables, and discussion. These techniques can be used independently or in conjunction with each other. I elected to use a narrative passage to provide a detailed discussion of the themes and relevant subthemes. The discussion incorporated specific illustrations of the themes as well as direct quotations and the multiple perspectives of the participants.

The final step and one of the most challenging aspects of the data analysis process is found in the interpretation of the data. Interpretation is essentially describing the ways in which we make meaning of the data. Interpretation derives from the collective

experience of the researcher and the participants in the study, as well as how the findings compare with information from the literature.

Confidentiality and Ethics

While procedures such as obtaining consent from parents of children under 18 and requiring IRB approval from school districts and universities are designed for the protection of human subjects, these measures are not 100% infallible. There are many ethical concerns that have to be considered and addressed when conducting qualitative research. Researchers have an obligation to their participants and to their work to perform due diligence in thinking through the ethical challenges that may arise in their study. I had many concerns about potential ethical dilemmas that could arise from completing my study with students that I interacted with on a daily basis. Comer (2009) asserted that actual or perceived student coercion and lack of confidentiality are two potential ethical dilemmas that can arise when conducting research on students that you work with. In addition to those concerns I also pondered questions like *What would I do if a student disclosed information that implicated a teacher or administrator in unsavory behavior? How would I handle a request from a colleague or authority figure to divulge information about my participants? What would I do if I was asked not to disclose or discuss any information that did not shed a positive light on the program?* All of these were legitimate concerns that had to be given consideration before beginning my research.

The first line of defense in confronting ethical concerns lies in the approval process required by the institutional review board that oversees research activities in school districts and at universities. Human subjects research is governed by Title 45, Part 46 of the Code Federal Regulations. These regulations require the protection of human

subjects in research studies, but they also stipulate certain ethical principles as they are delineated in the report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research titled *The Belmont Report* (NIH, 2006).

Despite the often stringent review process of an IRB, the investigator has the added responsibility of executing his or her study in a way that maximizes the respect of the participants and minimizes any potential harm. To reduce any perceived coercion of the students to participate in the study, I requested the assistance of a school district employee to distribute to and collect from the student participants their informed consent and assent forms. This practice helped to decrease the perception that I could discriminate against students who did not want to participate in the study (Comer, 2009). Additionally, because I did not directly teach or grade the students and given that the students were recruited at the very end of their senior years in high school, the involvement of someone other than me lessened any concern that I could influence the students' grades at either the high school or the university.

Ensuring confidentiality while conducting qualitative research can present a challenge (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010). Comer (2009) asserted that whenever faculty conduct research on their students, the possibilities for breaches of confidentiality exist. Creating a safe conversational space for the purposes of collecting data in qualitative research is paramount to obtaining the thick, rich, descriptive data that informs a case study. However the more details a participant shares, the greater the possibility that anonymity and, subsequently, confidentiality can be compromised. To address the issue of confidentiality, I used member checking as way for the participants to review how they were being portrayed in the study. Member checking allowed the

participants to review their comments and ensure that they were accurately recorded. It also allowed them to request that any excerpts that they felt exposed their identity could be removed from the transcript (Houghton et al., 2010).

To increase the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants who participated in the individual interviews, each is included in the study under a pseudonym that was either selected by them or assigned by me. During the focus groups, I explained the rules of confidentiality and asked that all participants abide by them, but I also cautioned the entire group that I could not guarantee confidentiality of their answers, as others may not abide by the rules. At the beginning of each individual interview, I also assured the participant that although the interview was being audio-taped, the resulting audio file would not be shared with anyone else.

Trustworthiness

There are several methods that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data. The use of multiple methods in a study increases the likelihood that the data will be trusted and deemed valid. Guba and Lincoln (1981) asserted that "qualitative researchers can establish the trustworthiness of their research by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of their studies and findings" (p. 81). To address the issue of the trustworthiness of my data, I employed the following methods: triangulation, member checking, and descriptive writing.

Merriam (1998) stated that "internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (p. 201). Two strategies that can be used to enhance internal validity are triangulation and member checks. I triangulated my data by using interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. By using multiple sources of data, I

sought to uncover information that would represent a holistic understanding of the topic, by revealing both corroborating and contradictory information related to the study.

Member checking involves taking the data and preliminary interpretations back to the study participants and providing them the opportunity to read and discuss the information gathered. While not the same as member checking, peer examination also involves the practice of engaging a trusted source to provide feedback on the findings as they emerge. Both member checks and peer examination were employed in my study. Prior to conducting my second round of interviews with my participants, I provided them with a copy of their typed transcript along with a synopsis of my preliminary findings from the first round of interviews and the focus groups. They were encouraged to correct any notes that were not transcribed as they had intended. This was a critical step as the first round of interviews was not audio-taped but was documented as a result of my note taking. No corrections were made by any of the participants. When the transcriptions from the second round of interviews were completed, they also were given to the participants to review. Following the completion of my open coding process and upon the identification of the themes that emerged from the data, I scheduled a meeting with four colleagues who reviewed my coding and rationale for how I was interpreting the data. All of the colleagues were people who knew my role as both researcher and as early college liaison. I solicited their advice as I believed they would assist me in identifying potential bias that may have emerged in the interpretation.

Finally, by writing descriptively I sought to address the issue of external validity. External validity affects the extent to which findings from the study maybe generalizable. By my using verbatim quotations to substantiate the themes and providing enough

description of the issues and context, “readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

Strengths and Limitations

The opportunity to present the students’ perspective on their early college experience and its impact on their preparedness for the postsecondary environment is by far a significant strength of this study. Additionally, the fact that this study will contribute to the empirical evidence related to the early college model, which has been scarce in the literature, is also a strength of the study. Participant follow-up has long been a challenge in conducting research. When it was time to contact the participants for follow-up interviews some contact information was no longer valid. I then moved to the popular social media platform “Facebook” to locate and contact the students. The introduction of social media as a mechanism to contact, communicate and stay connected to the research participants also adds to cadre of tools that researchers may employ to ensure greater opportunities for follow-up with participants. Another noteworthy strength of this study is the number of African American male students who participated in the interviews. The voice of the African-American male student is seldom represented in the literature. Nonetheless, there are limitations worthy of discussion as well. Most notably there are sampling limitations.

With such a small number of early college students all from the same school, the study was intended to be exploratory, rather than generalizable. The small sample size lessens the generalizability of the findings but allows for more in-depth understanding of the issues identified by the participants. Additionally, by interviewing only students, I

reduced the opportunity to triangulate the data with teachers, college faculty, and other key early college stakeholders. Incorporating the views of others may have enhanced my findings and increased the validity of the study; however, the focus of the study was to examine the subject from the perspective of the students.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology of this study, beginning with a description of the methodological framework and the statement of the specific research questions that guided it. Additionally there was discussion related to the propositions of the study, as well as a description of the research setting and participant demographics. I shared my subjectivities by describing my role as the researcher and my positionality and impetus for wanting to conduct this study. The data collection section described the qualitative interviews and document analysis which generated the data of the study. An explanation of the data coding process, involving Atlas.ti: The Knowledge Workbench V. 6.0 computer software and the data analysis was followed by descriptions of the trustworthiness of the data collected, ethics and confidentiality and strengths and limitations. In Chapter 4, I present the findings from this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from my research, in which I examined the early college high school experience and perceived college readiness from the perspectives of participating students. The information in this chapter presents data gathered to answer the following research questions:

1. What were early college students' perceptions, as dual enrollment students, regarding their high school experiences?
2. How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success?
3. How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

The chapter is organized into two sections beginning with the students' early college high school experiences, where they were first introduced to the postsecondary environment as 15- and 16-year-old dual-enrollment students. The data in this section derive from the three focus groups that were held and the 13 first-round individual interviews conducted with the students, whose profiles were presented in Chapter 3. Section one addresses my first and second research questions. The second section of the chapter provides findings relevant to the third research question and emanates from the data collected in the second round of interviews from the nine participants that transitioned into the postsecondary environment as full-time traditional college students.

Within each section I discuss the overarching themes that emerged from the data relevant to the participants' experiences either as dual enrollment students or as traditional college students following graduation from high school. As indicated in Chapter 3, the development of the salient themes for the study occurred during a process of multiple cycles of initial coding as I collected interview data over a 2.5 year period. Saldaña (2009) asserted that coding is a heuristic, "an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow" (p. 8). This statement was germane to my process in that the study was exploratory in nature and my goal was to examine early college from the perspective of the students, privileging their voices by documenting their experiences with their words. While there are many types of coding methods that can be applied to qualitative data, I found that in-vivo and descriptive coding were the most appropriate for my first round of coding. I used an open coding framework for the focus group and first round of individual interviews data. However, coding for the second round of interviews was drawn specifically from the literature on college readiness and social capital theory.

The Early College High School Experience: A Foundation for the Transition to College

> Early college high school is a bold approach, based on the principle that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, is a powerful motivator for students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges. Early college high schools blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college. (Webb & Mayka, 2011)

To put the above quotation in context, early college schools are not for the faint at heart. Students are required to work hard. In return for their hard work, there is the reward of college credit and a high school diploma in the same amount of time that their peers in

traditional high schools would earn a high school diploma. Early colleges are designed to meet the needs of underrepresented students who are highly motivated to succeed in high school but may not have received the necessary academic preparation to do so. The early college model is aggressive in that students must be prepared to be successful high school and college students concurrently. To increase the odds that an early college student will graduate from high school and transition to the postsecondary environment, Hoffman, Vargas and Santos (2010) identified three essential resources that must exist across grades 9 through 14. These resources include a rigorous academic program that scaffolds academic demands seamlessly between high school and college level work; a dependable source of higher education financing, beginning in at least the ninth grade; and a network of support systems that includes families, schools and the community that will follow them through high school and into college. The adult partners in the initiative must ensure that the students are not only academically and emotionally prepared but also developed in the necessary sociocultural skills associated with college readiness. This approach to fully developing early college students is evinced in the five interrelated core principles of early college:

- Core Principle 1: Early college schools are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education.
- Core Principle 2: Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.
- Core Principle 3: Early college schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion.
- Core Principle 4: Early college schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.

- Core Principle 5: Early college schools and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement. (http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHSICorePrin.pdf)

To that end, it would be expected that the early college experience should provide a strong foundation upon which the students would be able to make a successful transition to the traditional postsecondary environment. The key informants in this study provided in-depth reflections on the impact that early college had on their academic and personal development in the context of preparing them for college after high school. Four themes emerged from the data as the students described their early college high school experiences: (a) navigating the high school and college culture; (b) student peer groups' impact; (c) teacher contributions to student development; and (d) the early college experience as a foundation.

Navigating the high school and college culture refers to the students' ability to maneuver through and assimilate into the values, beliefs, and behavior patterns inherent in the postsecondary culture while also functioning within the boundaries of the high school culture. This proved to be quite challenging for the early college students as they were required to vacillate between their identities as high school students and college students. The second theme, student peer groups' impact, describes how the students experienced both positive and negative outcomes from the student cohorts they were placed in as dual-enrollment students. The third theme, teacher contributions to student development, provides insight into how the participants were affected by the interactions they had with their high school teachers. Finally, the early college experience as a foundation reflects the students perceptions of how prepared they felt academically and socially to enroll in college. These four themes describe how the early college experience

helped to shape the students perceived college readiness for transitioning into the traditional college environment.

Navigating the High school and College Culture

In the focus groups and the interviews, students made references to the challenges they faced navigating the college culture as dual-enrollment students. For many of these students who were first-generation college attendees, they did not have the benefit of being able to learn norms and customs of college culture from their parents or other close kin. The early college model was still in its infancy when these students actually began taking college courses and based on the perceptions of the informants, teaching the college culture was not a facet that was given enough consideration prior to them beginning their dual-enrollment experience. Mary Francis stated, “No one at the high school really explained anything about the college culture. Somebody should have helped better explain the college expectations and what the college culture was all about.” Another student stated, “There should have been more preparation at the high school so that the high school experience was more like what college would be like.”

In this regard, the participants reported a number of challenges that described their experiences learning to understand the culture of higher education. The following issues emerged from the data as matters of importance: (1) accessing college resources and supports, (2) high school vs. college expectations, and (3) the pressures associated with being an early college student.

Accessing College Resources and Support

College courses often require students to be “independent, self-reliant learners” (Conley, 2007, p. 5) who are capable of recognizing and understanding when they are

having problems and who also know ways to access support from professors, peers, and other postsecondary resources in order to overcome those challenges. While guiding the students into being independent and self-reliant was a goal of the program, the students identified a number of barriers that hindered their abilities to grow in this area. For instance, many early colleges are located directly on the college campus, which allows students to capitalize on easier access to their professors as a part of their school day. Urban Early College, the site of this study, was not located on the college campus. Students were bused from the high school to the college on the days they had college courses. If they did not have a college course on a particular day, they were at the high school and constrained by the rules of the high school. This resulted in logistical challenges that prevented the students from being able to seek help from their professors during regular office hours or from meeting with some of the traditional college students who may have been a part of their group assignments. They were required to be transported to and from the college campus by the high school transportation, thereby limiting their abilities to get to campus and speak with their professors outside of class-time. Damien shared the following regarding being able to meet with his college professors:

> I mean early college, I think one of the weaknesses were, umm we didn't have the opportunity to go to professors as often as we needed to. Because like a lot of cases, when we were at Urban Early College High School, see Urban Early College High School planned around our class schedule at Partner College but they did not plan around the professor's office hours. So if I wanted to go to the professor's office hours I would have to go out of the way to, you know, get to the professors' office hours and usually that wasn't possible.

This was not necessarily a problem for all students but for some it was a challenge. From a policy perspective, this represents the challenge of having students governed by two systems not formally aligned to ensure optimal success for the students.

Reflections from the participants in the study indicate that they did not enter their dual-enrollment experience equipped with the necessary skills or confidence they needed to access support from their college professors. They pointed out that this deficit resulted in missed opportunities to acquire assistance and course information that could have resulted in greater success with their courses.

Kandi described how the difference in her psychology grade and freshman English grade was a direct result of her level of comfort in talking with her professors. She explained how difficult it was for her to feel comfortable in her psychology course because of the large number of students in the class. Her English course had a small number of students in it, which was more reflective of the number of students in her high school courses. She compared the differences in her relationships with each of the professors from these courses and confirmed that because she felt more comfortable talking to the English instructor, she achieved a better grade in the class. The psychology class had over 100 students in a theater-style classroom, and even though she sat closer to the front of the lecture hall she was self-conscious about asking questions with that many people in the class. It was also difficult to talk directly to the instructor after class because there were often lots of students waiting to speak with him. She never felt comfortable speaking directly with her professor and consequently earned a "D" in the course. Conversely, her freshmen English course was comprised of only 20 students and she had a more personable relationship with her instructor. She was comfortable asking questions

in the English class and getting clarification on issues that she did not understand. She earned a “B” in that course. She shared the following:

> There was no personal relationship with the professors at partner university like there was bonding at Urban Early College High School. I did much better in both my freshmen English courses because the courses were smaller and the teachers were more personable. Those classes felt more like Urban Early College High School. I felt more comfortable going to the professor after class and the professors gave more personalized attention.

For some students, instead of moving along the continuum to becoming more “independent and self-reliant,” they turned to a greater dependence on their high school teachers to assist them with their college assignments. For instance, Angel, who had a difficult time understanding the expectations of one of her college professors, shared that,

> My English language arts teacher helped me a lot with the perspectives course especially with writing papers, making edits, etc. My professor at the college was not very clear with what he wanted from us, so I would just go back to my English language arts teacher and she helped me understand. She really helped to make things clearer.

To compensate for not feeling comfortable talking with their college professors, some students, like Angel, would return to the high school and solicit the assistance of their early college high school teachers, thereby eliminating the need for them to develop relationships with the college professors.

There were also students in the study who did feel comfortable talking with their college professors and they shared that their interactions and persistence with getting to the instructors often made the difference between them failing and passing their course. Some did share that they were nervous about talking to the professors but after overcoming that fear realized that college professors were very approachable. Flora spoke about her desire to overcome her fear of talking to her professor. She shared that although they were in a large lecture hall “with more students than I could count” in the course,

she felt that it was necessary for the professor to "see her face" so that he would be able to identify her. She did not want to be just another student in the class. Monte commented that despite his apprehension about going to talk to his World History professor, he knew when he received a low grade on a paper he had to do something to prevent him from failing the class. When he did talk to the professor, he was able to get clarity on the assignment and was allowed to do an extra assignment to make up for the failing grade.

Developing the confidence and knowledge necessary to access and utilize college resources, such as professors and peers, is a key acquisition in the development of a strong foundation of college readiness skills. Although some of the urban early college students were able to progress in this area, others were inhibited either by the conflicting policies of the high school regarding transportation to the college or the ease of access to their high school teachers eliminating the need for them to interact with their college professors.

High School Expectations vs. College Expectations

The transition between high school and college holds many new rules and opportunities for students. The cultural and social expectations in college are often very different from those experienced in high school. Navigating those differences can be very challenging especially as students are discovering that most of the rules that they learned during their K-12 education are either "discarded or modified drastically" (Conley, 2007, p. 4). Students in the study often remarked that the culture and expectations of the high school needed to align more with those of the college. Monte shared that he and other students were disadvantaged at the high school by being given the opportunity to make up late high school work or to miss deadlines with no consequences because that was not

"what was expected of you in college." Collier and Morgan (2008) purport that college success is more than just academic proficiency, it is also necessary for students to understand their instructors' course expectations and be able to apply their skills to meet those expectations. All of the participants in the study were quick to identify that they were not held to the same academic rigor and expectations at the high school as they were in their college courses. The issue of second and third chances to make up work in high school appeared repeatedly in the comments indicating that the respondents realized that this was in direct contrast to what was expected of them in college. Mary Francis expressed her concern with this issue: "Teachers needed to be more consistent and have the same expectations like college and not keep giving 2nd and 3rd chances." Flora expressed her resentment with being "babied" and not being seen as a real college student:

> We could have used more support in the area of learning study skills. There should have been more preparation at the high school so that the high school experience was more like what college would be. The papers we had to write in high school should have been longer, like what would have been expected in college. The teachers at early college babied us and that was a hindrance.

Early college high schools are designed to introduce college expectations, college exposure and experience, and college-level challenges to the students that attend them (Nakkula & Foster, 2007). Through the advisement process and teacher support the high school is responsible for "scaffolding" these elements into the curriculum and equipping the students with knowledge of these expectations (Nakkula & Foster). Early college students and their families rely on the adults in their schools to train the students with the necessary skills that will develop their competencies, skills and ability to succeed in college. Students must be able to trust and believe that they are prepared in order for

them to attain the necessary level of confidence that they will need to transition into full-time students.

The test of being able to manage enrollment in both college classes and high school courses is a test of how well a student manages his or her time and discerns the appropriate priorities at both academic units. Many of the early college students were managing three to four high school courses along with their college courses. The number of courses at either institution varied depending on the student. When asked how they managed their time to accommodate such a work load, the students were clear that their high school work took precedence because the high school grades were needed for graduation. Monte described his decision-making process about allocating time between college and high school classes by sharing that he wanted to make sure that he excelled in his high school work. He made a choice to be successful with his high school coursework because he felt that should be his priority. He stated "it did not make sense to pass the college courses but not graduate from high school because I failed my high school courses." Kandi echoed this sentiment, sharing that "early college classes always were more important than college classes 'cause I needed early college classes to graduate."

Time management skills are essential as a college student (Adelman, 2006; Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2009). Learning to prioritize responsibilities and ensuring that you have allocated enough time to completing projects takes time, skill, and practice. In the case of these students, they weighed their options and reasoned that emphasis on their high school courses needed to take the priority. Their reflections indicate that there is a heavy burden on them to manage the demands of two workloads with such different expectations.

The Pressure of Being an Early College Student

Early college students share some common identity attributes by virtue of the populations of students that the program targets; students who are minority, low-income, first-generation college attenders, and English language learners (JFF, 2003). Ogbu (2004) defined collective identity as a sense of "belonging," a way in which people develop a sense of who they are. The collective identity established with the early college students derived from their unique position as the first group of students in the state to test the early college model. That position heralded them into a notoriety that drew attention from state education officials, college administrators, faculty and staff, and local media. So often they found themselves in the spotlight, being constantly reminded that they were the standard-bearers for how the early college program would be received.

During the focus group session I the question, "What does it mean to be an early college student?" Following are a sample of responses:

- We're under a spotlight, a lot of people hate us, but then there are people that do support us.
- We were under a lot of pressure.
- There is a lot expected of us-They want us to achieve a lot. To do a lot in both places in high school and in college.
- There was also a lot of pressure from the teachers and administrators to be successful. Sometimes the pressure was too much. Sometimes it felt like we did not have a choice but to succeed there was no room for failure and sometimes that pressure was too much.

Previous comments discussed the difficulties in choosing between high school and college expectations in relationship to academic success and the need to graduate from high school. However, sometimes the students chose high school norms over college norms just to alleviate the pressure of attending college and the expectations that were set

upon them. Eric shared why he needed to withdraw from his dual-enrollment courses during his senior year in high school:

> Like my focus wasn't really on college my senior year, it was just high school, and getting these scholarships and essays written. That was my main focus, getting all this college stuff (*applications for college*) together and I was like I'll deal with college when it's time for me to really get into college. I was like, "I'm in high school, I want to live the regular high school life so when I get older I'll have some stories to tell." Tell folks about when I was in high school. I know I'm a be like, "I was just a book-worm my whole four years of high school." That wasn't going to be too tight. So um, I didn't do too well (in the college courses). And I got pulled from the class."

While there were other high school students attending the university and earning college credit they did not draw the attention that the early college students did. At the college that the early college students attended the number of dual enrollment students prior to the start of the early college program did not exceed 30-35 students per semester. The coordination that was required to dually enroll 80 high school students from one school drew attention from professors and college administrators so that the anonymity afforded to other dual-enrollment students who were not a part of the early college program was not available to the early college students. For many of the Urban Early College students, this notoriety was unwarranted and added to the pressure they were already experiencing. They sought to fit in, not to be treated differently, but it was very difficult to do. When I asked Angel how she felt about her identity being known as a high school student, the exchange went as follows:

> White: What do you think was different in terms of how you got treated than perhaps how traditional students would have had it?
>
> Angel: We-, hm, they sent out emails with all of our names, like these are the high school students in your classes. So it's like when she called roll every day there were only, like, 20 of us. She was like, 'oh, you're my high school students' - Thank you for

letting the world know. [For a traditional college student] the college professor would just been like, okay, she's not here, keep moving.

White: So you feel like you got extra attention?

Angel: Yeah, and if one of us wasn't there she would always ask us, 'well where's whoever?' Don't know. Don't really care. Can you teach?

White: Did you have the same professor for 1101 and 1102?

Angel: No. 1101 I had, can I say his name?

White: Hm-mm.

Angel: 1101 I had a female teacher. 1102 I had a male teacher.

White: Hm-mm, hm-mm.

Angel: So he was a lot better about it than she was cause I don't think he had our names.

White: Hm.

Angel: She had a name. So everything. Her entire class was revolved around convenience for us. Other people [professors] don't really care about convenience. This is what you do. Now go do it.

Eric agreed with Angel as he remarked,

> I really don't know why, I think because maybe a lot of professors some of them knew that we were the high school kids like that was well known on campus that it's a bunch of high school kids on campus that go here and they might be in your classroom. And uh, I didn't feel or I felt like we might have gotten special treatment on certain stuff 'cause we were in high school. So they sort of took a little pity on us or they would say oh they are just in high school so they don't know no better. And I didn't want that to be the case with me I was like if I earn this then that's what I earned. Like if I earned a "D" then that's what I earned then that's what I should get I shouldn't get more or less just cause I was in high school.

Angel and Eric reflect the frustration and disappointment that many students expressed regarding the differential treatment that they perceived at the college. These practices would seem to undermine the development of the student's confidence in their own abilities and detract from a healthy development of their educational identities. In their research on early college educational identity, Nakkula and Foster (2007) pointed out that

college experiences help to reinforce the “knowing” that a high school student needs to begin to formulate who they are as students. They point out,

> Knowing is different from believing. Knowing . . . is rooted in experiential evidence. Whereas believing is largely an abstract, future-oriented phenomenon—“I believe I can succeed in college, based on my success in high school”—knowing has a stronger, immediately relevant, experiential foundation: “I know I can succeed in college because I have begun to do it.” (p. 155)

The appearance that college professors would relax their criteria or be more lenient with the students only served to reinforce that people did not believe in them.

It should not be a surprise that students who participate in the early college program are challenged not just academically but emotionally and physically as well. Two students discussed the emotional and physical toll they experienced. Eric graduated from high school and went on to a traditional postsecondary school the fall following graduation from high school. It was a last minute decision for him to attend because he had been contemplating just taking a semester off from school before starting college. He was counseled against that and started college in the fall. He shared that by the time the spring semester started he was spent emotionally and physically, suffering with a mild depression and a serious case of insomnia. He described his emotional state after graduating from high school:

> I wasn’t really just pumped to go to college like that. Even before, I told my mom what do you think if I just went to college in the springtime rather than going in the fall. And she was like ‘why would you do that?’ I said I feel like I’m burnt out a little bit right now. I’m pretty tired and I feel like I achieved a lot she said ‘why you sleep so much?’ I said ‘cause I’m tired. I’m really tired my mind it never rests, I am constantly on my feet, if I’m not at school or at college [where he took dual-enrollment classes] I’m with the mentoring organization doing scholarship stuff with them, and I work also. So it was like I felt I was just burnt out from that one year. ‘Cause I really just at the end gave it my all. And it tired me out, whether people want to believe it or not. You get tired, mentally, physically, emotionally, you get tired. And my mom she wasn’t

> understanding that I was mentally burnt out. She was like 'how you still go to the gym and play ball every day?' I was like that is something I enjoy doing, it brings me, like I go to the gym, I get happy, like I get all the energy in the world. But some things I was like Mom I am just mentally tired. I just want to rest my mind, I don't want to deal with this. I will deal with this later. And just things like that."

Angel also realized that her journey through the early college experience was overwhelming enough to necessitate a need to take a break from school before beginning college. She, too, had to convince her parents that she was too overwhelmed to start college right away. She described why she needed a break:

> High School was stressful. Just the way we were set up. Courses in high school, courses at college. We're only in eleventh grade, tenth grade for some of us. I need a break. Just give me four months, four months to just kind of relax during the day, go to work in the evening. Then talk to me in January.

Student Peer Groups' Impact

Sociologists in education define a peer group as a group of people who share special characteristics such as gender, age, race or social status (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995). The term "student peer group" is narrowly defined as a cohort of students that are the same age and in the same grade. The narrowness of that definition does not account for many other factors, such as differences in place of residence, social philosophy, academic prowess and others, that cut across age and grade (DeMarrais & LeCompte). Student peer group influence had a formidable impact, both positively and negatively, on the students of Urban Early College High School.

When the early college students were preparing to attend the university for the first semester in the fall of their junior year, the teachers and the school administrator constructed student peer groups or "cohorts" that would be placed in college classes together. They were divided into groups of 7-10 students per cohort. The idea was to

create a support system for the students while not creating a college class of high school students. The cohorts were identified by a letter of the alphabet. The assignment of the letters A - E was completely random. The students in those cohorts were students thought to have the potential to succeed in college coursework but had not necessarily shown all their academic potential or social maturity in high school. These students were given two college courses and five high school courses their first semester at the college. Cohorts F and G were students who had shown definite academic promise in high school; however, some were perhaps not as socially mature as others in their cohort. The idea was that perhaps by adding a mix of students with differing social maturation, all would rise to the higher level, and support each other. Nonetheless these students were all placed in a freshman learning community (FLC) with traditional first-year students. One cohort was placed in a FLC that focused on African American studies; another was placed in an FLC that focused on students who spoke English as a second language. The students in cohort H were determined to be both socially mature and academically successful in high school. In addition to four high school classes, they were given four college classes as a part of an FLC that was targeted to students who were interested in urban education. The students in cohort "I" were actually the group of students who were initially not going to be able to attend any classes at the college because they were having academic challenges at the high school. However, the school administrator wanted everyone to have an opportunity to take at least one college course and decided at the last minute to allow these students to take one course, a freshman orientation course. During the first semester of the students' dual-enrollment experience, many lessons were learned by both the

school leaders and the students. The collective power and influence of friends was a force to be reckoned with.

Student Peer Group – Benefits

Research has proven that peer support has significant power to promote student learning (Lerner & Brand, 2007) and to develop the necessary social skills that young people need to be successful in college. When the students were no longer placed in cohorts their second semester at the college, many recognized that they had lost a significant source of support. Dennis reflected,

> At first I did not see any benefit to being in a cohort of other students. But then I realized that the cohorts were designed to help you feel familiar in an unfamiliar place. When you looked around and didn't see your friends from high school you felt out of place. It was scarier, and you knew you were in college and not in high school anymore.

Flora shared that "it was much harder in my classes without the support of other early college students." The support from other students came in many forms. When a student missed a class, they had someone they knew would be there to get the information and be able to share it with them. Students also relied on each other to help clarify discussions and concepts from the class that may not have been well understood. The dynamic of the cohort had far reaching effects some positive and some negative. Kandi described her experience with being in a cohort:

> I liked being in the cohorts because the students had to depend on each other, the students in the cohort had to bond with each other. There was lots of interaction that was both positive and negative; it could go either way with the students. Sometimes they would encourage you to go to class and sometimes they would encourage you to skip class. I also had to make friends with new people, some people who I had never talked to before at early college. My cohort helped each other with schoolwork, and made new friendships.

Dianna pointed out, with great pride, the academic success of her cohort:

> Our grades as a collective cohort were great. You know what I'm saying? Like, I think our average they said was an 83 or something like that. And I mean that’s, not, excellent, but I mean to be 11th graders taking on 6 classes half of them in college. I think it's just phenomenal having that many people collectively, we took the same classes, had the same breaks, one person in the class was like, hey. Hey, we all in this together so we need to do this together, you don’t turn your back on none of this. This is all, this is good stuff. . . . they need to bring that back, that’s why you need to make sure that they bring cohort's back because that helps, that helps.

Another positive outcome of the students’ being placed in cohorts was the constructive competiveness that it created among the students. They motivated each other to do better and to be better—the infusion of a little healthy competition made it fun for them. Mary explained that there was a male student in her cohort that she was always trying to outdo academically. This kept her focused on being successful in her college classes, plus she had fun teasing him and joking back and forth about whom had the best grades.

Student Peer Group - Challenges

Jaffe (2007) examined the social-structural factors of student peer cohorts that contributed to negative unintended consequences. Two of those consequences were unruly student behavior and student resistance to learning, both of which were experienced by students in early college student peer cohorts.

In the same way that the close association of the peer group can foster the intended consequence of developing a community of learners, it can also reinforce the less desirable characteristics of the high school environment resulting in “excessive socializing, misconduct, disruptive behaviors and cliques” (p. 67). Jaffe’s research focused on college freshmen of traditional college age, 18-19 years old. No early college student was older than 17 years of age when the students first started taking classes at the partner college. Emotional maturity may very well have played a considerable role in the

negative behaviors that occurred at times. However the students themselves expressed disdain regarding their peers who participated in negative behaviors. Flora expressed that some of the students in her cohort really tried to do well and pass their courses but "others were awful." She shared that when the students behaved badly it affected everybody because their behavior reflected on all of the early college students.

One of the students who participated in the focus groups spoke at length about his regrets at influencing his friends not to attend classes and subsequently seeing his friends fail. Ibrahim, who at mid-term was performing well in his English 1101 course, failed the class for no other reason than he gave up and succumbed to peer pressure.

Ibrahim: I think I kinda wanted to be different from my surroundings and different from the people that I would be around. I actually wanted, I just wanted somebody to be proud of me for doing good.

White: Um-hm

Ibrahim: So I tried to take that route but I kinda got influenced doing the wrong things. I got lazy. I was hanging around lazy people.

Placing the students in cohorts had its benefits and its challenges; however, the students' experiences of working together to support each other academically and socially exposed them to the power of using study groups. Effectively using study groups is a key academic behavior associated with students being deemed college ready.

Teacher Contributions to Student Development

According to the 2005 implementation plan for the Urban Early College High School, teachers that were hired for the program were expected to:

- Be knowledgeable in their content area;
- Be skilled in secondary pedagogy;
- Demonstrate and sustain a nurturing, standards-based classroom;

- Have experience working with students who were struggling academically;
- Participate and provide leadership in the "total life" of their students;
- Have a willingness to create positive, student-centered teacher-parent/family relationships.

All of the students in the study acknowledged that the teachers at the high school were a source of support and to varying degrees met the expectations as outlined above. As previously discussed many students in the study felt that the teachers "babied" them academically and did not set college-level expectations of their work. However, students also shared their perspectives on the teachers' abilities to effectively teach in their content areas and to establish the personal caring types of relationships that indicated their genuine concern for the students. Caring, friendly, natural born teacher, energetic, great math teacher and mentor were a few of the words used to describe the teachers. Dennis, a student who started taking college courses when he was a sophomore, said this about two of his teachers:

> It is hard to explain about this teacher. She is/has a natural born gift for teaching. She is not boring. She took the past and made it relevant in life now. My lowest quiz grade in her class was an 89. We had a connection, she understood me. I know that other students pegged me as a weird kid, because I would always try to find an alternate route for doing things. No matter how far-fetched my ideas were, she always encouraged me. She seemed to understand that things for African American students do not always come easy. But when things are difficult lowering the standards doesn't always help. She told me "You have to persevere through the thorns to get to the roses."

He added,

> And one of the male teachers was a great teacher. He instilled in me that giving up doesn't accomplish anything. He helped me to see things in a broader sense. He was a blast. He knew how to make math simple. For

> anything that was foggy, he could take jumbled up stuff and make it simple. He had passion and believed that the kids were smart. He was a powerful black man because of his passion for teaching. He told us that we can make this world better. He was able to make the kids who were less focused, more focused.

When asked about her relationship with her teachers, Angel stated that her English-Language Arts teacher helped a lot with writing papers and making edits. She stated that the college professor was not very clear with what he wanted and the high school teacher really helped to make things clearer. She also felt like they kind of had a relationship that was not just school-related. She stated that her teacher gave her advice on personal matters as well. She stated that having that relationship with her really helped her as a student as well because she had someone to talk to without feeling so burdened. She felt she could lean on her for support.

The literature supports that there are a host of noncognitive skills that students need to be successful in college (Ramsey, 2008). Perseverance, motivation, and the ability to adjust to changing circumstances (Hooker & Brand, 2009) are listed as a few of them. Based on the students' perceptions, it appears that their high school teachers were instrumental in helping to develop key college readiness skills.

While the above experiences are the ones we know make a positive difference in the education outcomes for early college students, there are also students who felt ostracized and disconnected from the teachers at the high school. Mary believed that there were certain students who received more attention and support than other students did:

> I didn't get support that I felt was necessary for me to be successful. No one gave in-depth information on what I was getting into. No one asked what I needed help with. It seemed that the teachers and administrators seemed to care more about certain students than all the students. I wanted to know why we were not all receiving help equally. There seemed to be

> favorites. Some people got more attention and recognition for their work at the college while all of us or most of us were really trying and did not get any attention. Teachers, the principal and the counselor gave more attention to certain students and those students had more resources to assist them. I saw a student get individual attention with a paper, where the teacher actually sat down and went over the paper with the student, but the same teacher only reviewed my paper and gave it back with notes on the paper without ever talking to me. The favoritism was obvious.

Kandi also voiced her concerns about how the teachers interacted with the students:

> Teachers kept their relationships with the students more professional than open and caring. Teachers were more about what was going on at school and not enough caring about the effects of the student's home life. I wish the teachers were more understanding and sharing of our personal lives.

Kandi's comments depict teacher behaviors that were contrary to the meaningful and caring teacher-student relationships deemed necessary by early college principles; however; there are also professional standards and ethical concerns that teachers must be attentive too, that may account for why some teachers may have a challenge engaging in these types of relationships.

The Early College Experience as a Foundation

The integration of high school and college as designed in the early college model represents new territory in the experiences of students who have traditionally been under-represented in the postsecondary environment, students for whom college is not a given (Hoffman, Vargas, Venezia, & Miller; 2007). Secondary-postsecondary partnerships that support students' taking college courses in high school have a long-standing history servicing higher achieving students who wanted a headstart in college. The use of dual-enrollment programs to increase graduation rates and college access rates for under-represented students is novel and the empirical evidence to substantiate its impact is still being compiled, although preliminary reports show that the impact is positive (Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2009; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Webb & Makya, 2011). The data from

this study provide concurring evidence that early college has had a positive impact on students' commitment to attending a postsecondary institution after high school.

Being prepared for college encompasses more than just having the intellectual capabilities to complete college course work. Intellect is important, but there are also psychosocial skills that must be developed to ensure a successful experience for college students. When the students in this study were asked the questions, "How prepared do you feel to continue your college education?" and "How has being an early college student influenced your future plans about college?" they provided responses that described the lessons they learned about how to be successful in college, the commitment they had to continue in the traditional postsecondary environment, and the development of their academic identities.

Lessons Learned

The participants differentiated between their high school dual-enrollment college experience and their future college experience by describing their future experiences using the term "real" college. When students were asked in the interview to describe how prepared they felt they were for transitioning to the traditional college environment, responses included

> I feel a lot more prepared for the real college now, I understand that I need to study, that I should not be afraid to talk to professors, do not wait until the last minute to get work done; try sitting in the front of the class, do not get distracted by the cell phone. (Kandi)

> I know what the expectations are as far as academics at college are concerned. I know it would be more work than what I experienced as a dual enrollment student. I feel more prepared for when it is time to go to college for real. (Mary)

The early college program is in many ways the academic equivalent to a trade apprenticeship program, allowing students the opportunity to learn in an environment

where there are caring adults and supports to encourage their academic development and strengthen their confidence in their ability to learn and be college students. The students shared examples of successes and challenges that revealed valuable lessons to be learned. Dennis described how he learned to appreciate classical music by staying the course and not dropping his college music appreciation class. He shared how the class was one of the biggest he had ever been in, around 125 students, and that by midterm there were only about 60 students in the class. He was borderline passing the class and considered dropping it as well but instead hung in there. He remarked that he felt "he would gain something from the class whether he passed or failed." He stated that he wished that he had done better in the class (His final grade was a "D.") but he also remarked that if he had dropped the class he never would have discovered what his favorite piece of classical music was. The ability to persevere is a key college readiness characteristic. In a College Board research report that discussed student characteristics related to college readiness, Wiley et al. (2010) noted the importance of students needing to have a willingness to try new things and to be willing to fail at them the first time. Dennis exemplified why this willingness to try new opportunities exposes the students to a deeper learning than just what is reflected in a grade.

Conley (2007) identified that a key academic behavior aligned with academic success for college students is "the ability to participate successfully in a study group and recognize the critical importance of study groups to success in specific subjects" (p. 16). The development of the cohorts for the students reinforced the students' acquaintance with using study groups. The benefits and challenges of having other students to study with were mentioned in the interviews by a number of students. Angel described how

being in a cohort allowed the students to study together and use each other as resources. She stated that they would ask each other questions about the material and the person who knew the most about the information they were studying would lead the discussions. If no one in the group felt comfortable with the material, then they would seek out one of the traditional students in the class and if that did not work then they would ask the professor. These steps as outlined by Angel indicate that the students were developing academic behaviors that would carry over into their experience as a traditional college student.

Commitment to Transition to the Traditional Postsecondary Environment

Nakkkula and Foster (2007) report that success in college coursework has resulted in a positive effect on the students' view of themselves as learners and as future college students. All of the students, except one, who participated in the first round of interviews expressed their commitment to transition to the traditional postsecondary environment and credited their participation in the early college program as the experience that convinced them that they could go to college and be successful. This reinforces the claim regarding the importance of the "power of place"–students' being on a college campus–as an integral component in their development of college knowledge and seeing themselves as future college attenders. Angel remarked that she felt a lot more comfortable going to college having some idea of what is expected of her. If she had not been at early college she would not have seen the realities of college. She shared that college advertisements highlighted the parties and fun stuff at college not the academics and how hard you have to work. She stated that being a part of the early college program only confirmed what she already knew, that she was definitely going to college. She stated that from middle

school she knew that she was going to college. She wanted to be the first to go to college and graduate from college. Even though the work and adjustments were very challenging it was all worth it because she definitely felt more prepared to go to college.

Kandi concurred that her experience in the early college program resulted in her believing that she could be successful in the traditional postsecondary environment. In her interview, she described how challenging her college classes were as a dual enrollment student. She stated that there were days that she did not want to go to the college classes because they were so hard for her but that the experience made her want to go to college because she knew what was to be expected of her. She knew what to do and what not to do.

In his first interview, Horatio explained that he did not want to go college after high school. At the time of his first interview, he made the decision to go to a trade school instead of a four-year university because he thought that was a better fit for him. However, when I contacted him for the follow-up interview, he had completed one year at a four-year university. He shared that he made the decision to go to college instead of the trade school because going to trade school just was not going to be enough of a challenge for him. He stated that if he had not gone to early college, then he may not have gone to college at all. The opportunities he had at early college reinforced for him that he could do college level work, and if it did not work out then he could go to the trade school.

A key characteristic to the early college program is providing students with the opportunity to learn what it is like to be in college by taking college classes, using the college facilities and interacting with other college students (Hooker & Brand, 2009).

These activities allow students to see themselves as college attenders and build their confidence so that they can convert their dreams of attending college into a reality.

Academic Identity

The students' perceptions of their identities, academically and socially, during the dual enrollment phase of their high school experience revealed how demanding it was psychologically for the students to operate both as high school and college students. Nakkula and Foster (2007) in their study of academic identity in early college students posited that

> self-confidence or educational self-efficacy (confidence in one's educational abilities), pride, shame, motivation, and future orientation. All these psychosocial factors get wrapped together forming what we commonly call "identity"-that is, a core, consistent sense of who we are. (p. 151)

Managing these facets of identity is challenging enough just as a student maneuvers through the challenges of high school. The process becomes that much more difficult as they incorporate the college persona as well. Statements from the participants indicated that their identities as students were constantly in flux.

The interviews contain comments that alluded to the challenges that the students faced switching roles between high school and college. Some made comments that described how they felt that they had to trick people into thinking that they were college students. Not fully seeing themselves as true college students could account for why they referred to their future college experience as their "real" experience and not as a transition from one phase to the next. Kenneth shared the following thoughts about what it was like to be a dual enrollment student:

> . . . whereas when I was at the college the other students may have thought that I was a college student but I kind of still felt like a high school student, even though I was just kind of like mingling in there pretending to

> be a college student. I was in there with them but tricking them into thinking I was a college student.

Flora described how she saw herself in the classroom by stating:

> Even though I may have known the answers to things I was still scared to ask questions because I was still a high school student in the room with other real college students. I would always tell my high school friends that I was a college student and took real pride in that. But in college I always felt like a high school student.

Eric also described the dual enrollment experience as one that required the students to alternate identities in order to "fit in" in the college atmosphere:

> It was weird almost cause umm, cause almost you had to be like two different people sometimes like umm, I come to college I had to act older than what I was an carry myself at a higher level. Just so I can fit in or blend in without sticking out. High school was little more laid back: we grew up in here so it's almost like at a playful level.

These identity conflicts that the students have discussed reflect some of the ideas that have been examined by researchers such as Steele (2008), Fordham (1988), and Ogbu and Fordham (1986), who have studied the effects of racial and social identity on academic achievement in minority students. The issue of race was never mentioned by any of the students in the study, which is not a definitive indicator that it was not an issue for them. However, their focus on the challenges of having to switch between their high school and college identities reflects their concern with the possible judgments, stereotypes, opportunities, restrictions and treatment (Steele, 2008) tied to their collective early college identity. The issue of their identities and the challenges associated with who they are and what they represented emerged in the theme related to peer-group impact as well as here in the discussion on college readiness.

Summary of the Early College High School Experience

> Because who knows if I had not gone to Urban Early College High School I wouldn't have gotten into a traditional postsecondary institution in the

> first place. Maybe I, I definitely wouldn't have thought I was as smart as I was in the first place. I am glad I was able to keep up the pace with the other students. And I think that the skills I developed at Urban Early College really helped. Helped me to keep in the game. (Kenneth)

The early data from Jobs for the Future, the overarching intermediary responsible for oversight of the national early college high school initiative, reveals that the early college program is opening doors to higher education and career possibilities for many young people who have traditionally been seen as those who could not graduate high school on time or enter college without remediation (Webb & Mayak, 2011). When students are presented with the opportunity to challenge themselves academically and experience success, comments like those expressed by Kenneth lend credibility to the strategies of the program. Overall, the students' perceptions of their early college high school experiences were positive and they revealed that participation in the program enabled them to gain critical academic and psychosocial skills that would improve the likelihood of their success in the traditional postsecondary environment.

The themes and subthemes presented in the informant's description of their early college involvement provide valuable insight into how the students lived and experienced being the first students in their state to participate in and graduate from an early college high school. There were challenges, successes and lessons learned regarding navigating the college culture, working with peer groups, and understanding the influence of teacher expectations and how students create their academic identities.

All of the students who participated in the first round of interviews were expecting to transition from high school into the traditional postsecondary environment either at a four-year university, two-year university, or a trade program. However, not all of them were successful in doing that in the fall following graduation from high school.

Of the 13 original interviewees, 9 enrolled in a four year university within the first year following graduation from high school. Eight enrolled in the fall 2009 semester and 1 in the spring 2010 semester. The 4 who did not enroll in college or any form of post-secondary education, Kandi, Ibrahim, Mary-Francis and Dennis, were still hoping to attend college eventually. Their reasons for not enrolling in school included could not afford it and did not want to take out loans (Mary-Francis); undecided about what to major in (Dennis); did not get accepted into a public service academy, so not sure what he was going to do (Ibrahim); and wanted to work and make money before going to college (Kandi). The next section of this chapter elucidates how those students who did persist in the postsecondary environment perceived their college readiness and the impact their early college experience had on their experiences after high school.

College Readiness in the Traditional Postsecondary Experience

Webb and Mayka (2011) reported that close to 3,000 students from 64 early college schools across the country graduated from high school in 2009. Ninety-one percent of those students graduated with some college credit, and 44% had one or more years of college credit under their belts. Data from the National Clearinghouse reveal that many of those early college students (76%) transitioned into the traditional college experience (Webb & Mayka). The JFF student information system in conjunction with the National Student Clearinghouse has gathered substantial data on early college students related to graduation rates, college credit accumulation during high school, and college enrollment following graduation from high school. What is not as readily available in the literature is an account from the early college students' perspective of what their experiences have been since enrolling in college, particularly as it relates to

their college readiness skills and educational preparation. The findings in this section derive from the follow-up interviews that were conducted with early college students 19-23 months following their graduation from high school. The results provide answers to the third research question: How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

The findings presented here seek to answer the research question by examining the data through the lens of Conley's (2007, 2011) framework of college readiness. The results are presented as they relate to five key characteristics of college readiness: (a) the need for academic remediation in college, (b) key cognitive strategies, (c) key academic content, (d) academic skills and behavior, and (e) contextual skills and awareness. Additionally, I sought to examine the role of social capital in the development of the students' contextual skills and awareness.

The Need for Remediation

Remediation rates among college students have been on the rise, resulting in increased time to college completion, the use of financial aid on courses that do not count towards graduation, and additional costs to students and colleges (Baber, Barrientos, Bragg, Castro, & Kahn, 2009). Data from a 2004 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report reveal that students who are required to take a remedial course in college are more likely to drop out of college. Additionally, the report substantiates that students of color, first-generation college students, and low-income students are those most likely to be required to enroll in at least one remedial course. Entering freshmen at many colleges and universities are required to take a college placement exam to

determine their proficiency in math, reading, and sometimes writing. The scores from the placement exams are often the determinant of a student's access to college-level courses or to the need for a remedial course (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Conley (2007) purported that "college readiness can be defined operationally as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 5).

The Urban Early College students who attended college in high school as dual-enrollment students were only required to take the college placement exam for math and not for English. This enabled them to enroll directly into the freshmen English course as dual-enrollment students without having to meet the same assessment criteria to which traditional first-year freshmen were subject. In this case, the students were afforded an advantage that reduced the likelihood that they would be required to participate in a remediation course for English. Consequently, for the students who took the math placement exam, many scored below the minimum proficiency to be able to take a higher level math course, such as college algebra, resulting in few students' being able to take their college math as a dual enrollment student. Of the nine students who participated in the follow-up interviews, eight completed their college English requirements as dual-enrollment students in high school. As a traditional college student, only one of the nine was required to take a remedial course in both math and English, and one had to take a remedial course in math only. Given the increased odds for failure to persist if a student had to take a remedial course in either English or math, the data from this study indicates

that participation in the early college program may contribute to reduced likelihood of having to take a developmental course in college.

Key Cognitive Strategies

In a 2004 study conducted by Lundel, Higbee, Hipp and Copeland, college professors identified that first-year college students were in need of development in the areas of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Other studies have also reported that first-year students arrive on college campuses without the requisite skills to navigate the intellectual demands and expectations of the postsecondary environment (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Conley, 2003). Key cognitive strategies, also referred to as habits of the mind, are described as the intelligent behaviors that students must adopt and refine in order to be college ready (Conley, 2007; Costa & Kallick, 2009). Conley's model of college readiness proposes that there are seven key strategies associated with college success and ways of thinking: intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analysis, reasoning, interpretation, precision and accuracy, and problem-solving. These strategies are also closely associated with the process of critical thinking. For the purposes of this study, an examination of the students' perceptions related to their developing cognitive skills focused on how they described their ability to think critically. The students were queried regarding the confidence they had in their critical thinking skills and how those skills were developed and honed. Their results indicate that their early college experience had a significant impact on the confidence that they developed in their intellectual capabilities. Kenneth elaborated on the importance of his critical thinking skills by sharing,

> I noticed that when I was there [at the traditional college he enrolled in after high school] I always thought that I was gonna be the best critical thinker there is, but once you get into college you see that there are other smart kids that come from other places. You're not the only critical

> thinker that will be there. So I am really glad that I had Urban Early College High School to stimulate that at the beginning. . . . What I'm trying to say is I guess I wasn't slacking in critical thinking and being up to par. Being able to speak up in class and not be embarrassed and stuff like that when you are talking. And being able to actively participate in discussions.

Angel also described how her high school English courses honed her critical thinking skills such that when she enrolled in her college level english classes as a dual enrollment student she was equipped and prepared to succeed in that class. She shared that her early college English teachers would push them to think deeper about the material they covered in class. She stated,

> All we did was respond to whatever we read, like, thinking about what the author was trying to say, feelings he was trying to invoke, his messages, technique, that kind of thing. . . . Early college was beneficial, because, it, . . . the teachers they have college degrees, so it's like they can kind of help me out, push me further. I am a journalism major so I am pretty sure I am going to have to use those critical thinking skills again.

Key cognitive strategies and academic content are critical foundations upon which a student must build in order to achieve the necessary academic preparation to be successful in college. Employing the effective habits of the mind creates the opportunity for the students to understand and master the essential academic content that they will need in order to navigate across the academic disciplines in college (Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2009). The students' perspectives as discussed here are illustrative of the impact that their early college experience had on the development of their ways of thinking.

Key Academic Content

There is no substitution for a solid base in the area of academic content. Academic content standards are the foundation of state and district education systems, and also communicate to stakeholders like teachers, parents, and students the required

knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the college and career environments (Achieve, 2011). Students in early college programs are challenged academically, especially during their first two years of high school, to master the academic content in the high school curriculum so that they can successfully complete college coursework as juniors and seniors. Congruent with the early college principles, the high school curriculum should be relevant, rigorous, and reflective of the course material and ways of knowing that are present in the college classroom (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2008; Ravitz, 2010). When asked to share their thoughts on how prepared they were academically to start college as a traditional student, many of the participants expressed concern regarding the misalignment between the between the high school and college content.

High school and college differ in many ways; however, when examining the issue of academic content, there are distinct differences that students may not be aware of. While many college and high school courses have the same names, they are seldom anything alike. College instructors tend to emphasize different material, work at a faster pace, and have different outcome expectations than do high school instructors (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Conley, 2003; Roderick et al., 2009). Participants in this study shared the realities of these differences as they described how high school subjects that they achieved highly in often presented big challenges for them in college. For instance, Eric shared that his transition from high school biology to college biology was much more difficult than he expected.

> My biology class, I was good in biology in high school, and I was a biology major down there [at the college he attended after high school] so I thought this should be pretty easy. But like the biology they teach in college is way different from the biology they teach in high school. Um,

> so I had a little tough time with that. Yeah. I ended up picking it up at the end of the semester, I passed with a C. But it was tough, 'cause I actually had to like, it was like learning stuff all over again. 'Cause college, it gets so in-depth into some things and the teachers want to stay on that level compared to staying on some of the more simple things about biology. Like she got really in-depth to it. And I was like, I didn't know biology was this crazy. But umm, it was good I got it together. And by the end of the semester I wound up passing the class and I was really happy about that. 'Cause it had given me such a tough time at first so yeah.

Shannon shared a related circumstance with her college level science course.

> I will admit that this [science] has been the most challenging area. I've actually had to retake a course because I wasn't satisfied with my grade. The science courses at Early College were not only informative, but fun. The professors there [at early college] are quite effective. However, college level science is on a totally different playing field. There's no more hand-holding, no weekly progress updates and one must have an inquisitive mind-set to truly get an in-depth understanding of the material. I don't regret my failures, I have truly learned from them. That's what college is all about.

Monte experienced similar challenges with a college math course. Being a strong math student in high school, he believed he went into his college math class a little over-confident in his abilities. He shared the advice he had passed on to his younger cousin about math classes in college.

> I tell him that everything you learned in high school hold on to it. Just don't get big-headed. 'Cause you in the class [in college], it's the first day and you doing 1 + 1 then the next day you doing 2 + 2 you start off slow, but when it take off, it take off. So I, you know, I guess I was like I already know this. OK, I already know this, why we learning this? And a lot of people had to, I had to take it [the math class] a second time. And I got a B in it the second time.

The experiences of these students prevailed among the majority of the study participants and support the findings in the literature concerning the academic under-preparedness of high school students as they transition to college. As previously discussed, this issue is directly related to the growth in remedial education and illuminates the distinct educational division between the secondary and postsecondary environments.

Academic Skills and Behavior

Research by Conley (2007) and others (Roderick et al., 2009; Wiley et al., 2010) differentiate between academic skills and academic content in that the former is not associated with subject-specific content but instead examines a student's ability to write and engage in deeper analytical thinking across a range of subjects and disciplines. Academic behaviors represent noncognitive measures—factors not easily measured by standardized test, grades, or courses taken—of college readiness that have come to be recognized as important factors in evaluating college readiness. These academic behaviors are closely associated with a student's capacity for self-monitoring and ability to engage in an array of study skills. Time management and the effective use of study groups are just two of a host of study skills linked to the concept of key academic behaviors associated with college readiness (Conley; Roderick et al.; Wiley et al.).

Time Management

Time management is a skill that all participants mentioned as being a key attribute to having success in college. Some were able to hone this skill as they progressed through the dual enrollment program as an early college high school student; others were still working on developing better habits related to managing their time in college as a traditional student. Diana shared a valuable lesson that she learned while taking her English class as a dual enrollment student:

> I go back to my first class, my English professor. I turned in a paper late and she deducted 10 points. And it was the highest grade of all the early college students. And I got an 83, it was our last paper and it counted for the most so I ended up getting a 73 and at that moment she handed me a packet that said time management, organizational skills. She actually handed me a packet. I felt kind of embarrassed, but I was like, Don't be handing me no packet! You know like my whole attitude was, Don't be handing me no packet about time management but you know what? I

> actually followed it. It made me better , I mean I'm still young, I still kind of want to do things on my own time, but it just really prepared me for college, like I can't be turning things in late there are penalties for that.

For a few of the students the issue of time management was closely tied to the challenges they experienced finding a balance between their social lives and their academic requirements. This excerpt from my interview with Flora provides an example.

> White: So, sounds like socially there was a challenge? Could that have been any different? Do you think, if you look back on it now is it anything you could have done in high school that would have better prepared you for the social side of college?
>
> Flora: Yeah, um time management, time management. I think in high school and still today, I still do procrastinate. I prolong things and I still do that today.
>
> White: um
>
> Flora: So if I probably worked on time management in high school, I would have, like, not been such a burden on me in college, b/c I'm still trying to catch up w/everything there, so.

Aaron referred to his high school experiences as the genesis of his ability to use effective time management skills in college. When asked "When you were at early college, how were your time management skills?" he responded,

> Um, being that I was a student athlete for a while, it was kind of all over the place. But, I think maybe my sophomore year, it kinda came in line, you know? 'Cause we had, many times I had early morning practices, class in the morning. So, you know, you've gotta really manage your time. Especially, you've gotta manage your studies around your football and make sure they're equal for you to be successful at both.

When I followed up that question with one regarding how this helped him in college he responded,

> Yeah, and then I did a lot of reading on my own cuz I had, you know, to manage my time. Especially on the weekend you know, if you live on campus it's easy to say, I'm gonna stay in my room all day. . . . Like if you just took five hours out of your Saturday. You'd be good. But I used to take the whole Sunday and if I knew it was something major I would take that Saturday and that Sunday. I wouldn't do nothing but work on Sunday. All morning. So I could kinda stay ahead. Cuz I know that, you know, a

> lot of people was out doing other things. But, you know, it went, I can't be worried about what they're doing. I gotta do mine. So I know that if I can just sacrifice that little free time or going to the beach and, you know, taking advantage of Daytona on a Sunday, I could just, I could stay ahead.

Study Groups

All of the participants in the study shared that they had participated in one of more study groups since enrolling in college. Most shared that because they had been in cohorts during their early college experience they had no trouble using a study group as traditional college students. Angel shared the following insight about her high school experience of being in a cohort with other early college students:

> We could ask each other questions. We would seek out the person in the cohort who knew the most about the information or subject. If no one in the cohort knew the information then we would ask one of the regular students who was in our class. Then if that didn’t work we would go ask the professor. This really helped me get more comfortable working in study groups ‘cause I could see how having other people to study with helped in the areas I was weak in. So when I got to college I did not have a problem working with students in study groups.

Monte also shared how much support he got from being a part of a study group in college:

> And like I said my friends, they push me. If we are in the same class they know something is due we be up. Like this semester I really experienced it, the support of being a part of a group, you know. We were up at 5:00 in the morning been up all night working on homework papers. And I might lie down and I might sit on the floor and close my eyes and they tap me and say c’mon we gotta get this through work.

Damien saw the study groups as a way to survive in class until he was able to come up with enough money to purchase his books.

> You know you make friends. Then, hey, you got this book for this astronomy class or history class. That wasn’t that big of an issue and then once you get into your concentrated major a lot of the people you are in the same classes with like four or five classes. All your classes are the same people. So you form a study group, if you go to the study group most likely they have the books and umm and it’s not that easy, I mean hard.

> You [ask] can, I make a copy of such and such? Yeah it's not that hard to interact with people and make a study group.

A student's mastery of study skills is necessary to ensure academic success in college (Conley, 2003). As they broach this new domain of college, it is essential that they draw upon skills that enable them to assess and navigate the various academic and social demands specific to the postsecondary environment. Although these participants were in various stages of developing these skills it is apparent that they were cognizant of the importance of their academic behaviors in relation to their success in college. Additionally, their participation in the early college program appears to have established a foundation upon which they were able to build as they progressed from high school to college.

Contextual Skills and Awareness

This fifth category of college readiness covers a wide range of characteristics and sources of information that have in recent studies (Reid & Moore, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009) been shown to impact significantly both access and persistence for under-represented students at colleges and universities. It is also the area of college readiness that acknowledges the role that social capital plays in a student's preparedness for college. Conley (2007) stated, "contextual factors encompass primarily the privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and culture. It is this lack of understanding of the context of college that causes many students to become alienated, frustrated, and even humiliated during the freshman year and decide that college is not the place for them" (p. 17). These contextual factors are most frequently referred to in the literature as "college knowledge" and encompass a student's understanding of the college culture and norms and his or her ability to navigate the

college application and financial aid process. The early college program is positioned to ensure that students who attend an early college high school have the opportunity to access and acquire enough information related to “college knowledge” to lessen the odds of experiencing the negative outcomes purported by Conley above.

Social capital theory introduced into the educational researcher arena by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and American sociologist James Coleman has been used extensively to examine issues of academic success among students in the educational system. Coleman’s model of social capital (1988) distinguishes social capital as an investment that individuals create within social networks. This investment becomes a resource that they can then draw upon to enhance their opportunities in life. Of the three forms of social capital that he identifies–obligations, expectations and trustworthiness, information channels; and norms and sanctions–in this study I sought to understand the ways in which information channels facilitated the transference of key knowledge necessary for early college students to obtain “college knowledge.” Both Bourdieu and Coleman assert that information is the impetus that spurs a person to action. In the case of early college schools’ teachers, counselors, college professors and other ancillary supports of the program, all constitute networks of relationships that have the capacity to share the requisite information that early college students need to take the appropriate actions to learn and understand college culture and norms, as well as to navigate the college application and financial aid process.

Perspectives on College Knowledge

College differs from high school in the ways that adults view students and how students see themselves. Relationships between college students and their professors are

different, as are the expectations on college students to be self-starters, and more intrinsically motivated. The academic and social rules inherent in the K-12 system that high school students have been operating by are changing rapidly. The early college model stresses the importance of students having meaningful relationships and connections with adults while they are in high school. The participants in this study shared that the relationships they had with teachers, mentors, study coaches and others all proved beneficial in helping them to learn how to navigate the college culture and understand the new rules.

The college students who were hired to serve as study coaches for the high school students were mentioned by all of the respondents as being a primary source of information and encouragement during their dual-enrollment experience. Monte and Kandi both expressed how the study coaches were instrumental in helping them to understand how college works. Monte shared the following: "The conversations with my study coaches and regular students in my college classes helped me to understand college culture, how to act in class and how to interact with professors, as well as how to manage my time." Kandi also gave high praise to the college students who served as her study coach. She described the benefits of having had a room specific to the early college students, where they were able to have open discussions with the study coaches and build relationships with them. She described her engagement with the study coaches as:

> Being on campus allowed us time to bond with other study coaches and to develop relationships with other college students that could help us understand what it was to be a traditional college student. The study coaches were important to making sure that we learned the culture of college. They taught us how to approach professors, encouraged us to talk to the professors outside of class about things more than just our grades. Like make up work, things I did not understand in class, stuff like that. The study coaches would also get on our case when we cut up in class.

> They were always telling us how lucky we was to be a part of this program. How they wish they could have been a part of a program like this.

By exposing the early college students to the college environment in high school they had the opportunity to increase their social capital in the form of information channels by increasing their social networks to include current college students and college professors.

From the students' statements, it was evident that having had the experience of taking college courses in high school and being in an early college program they reaped benefits that translated into higher levels of confidence, better understanding of college course requirements and expectations, greater familiarity with the college culture and a smooth transition from dual enrollment student to full-time college student.

I asked Eric to describe his transition from high school to full-time college student:

> Eric: I felt like I was ahead of the curve almost, because of my experience at early college high school. In the early college program it really did prepare me a lot more than most kids that just came in as raw freshmen. And they didn't know nothing about the college life itself, except what days were the little parties, that was about it. Um, so yeah, um when I was a student here at early college and at the postsecondary institution where we took our dual enrollment courses, it really did help me a lot with what was going on at the college that I attended after high school. It helped me cause I was able to help other people, that went down there with me. Other students that went down there, we helped others cause we knew so much stuff ahead of time, like when to go get our books, um, checking on our accounts, our balances and stuff. When to meet with your financial aid people. We learned a lot and it prepared us, cause you see a lot of people when you go to college that are in that long financial aid line which is the worst thing you want to be in. I swear. Yeah so um, it helped. Like it helped us get stuff done, get things done early. Like get your FAFSA done ahead of time um, make sure you have your payments in ahead of time. I had to make sure I had my transcripts in ahead of time.

White: And was that stuff you learned here? I mean how did you know that? You wouldn't have had to do a FAFSA while you were taking college classes in high school. How did you get that information? Was it just information that was…?

Eric: Yeah it was information that was just given out or you just picked it up from people, I don't mean like you be eavesdropping, but you hear other people talk and you pick up on things.

White: Just from being here at the postsecondary institution where you took college classes in high school.

Eric: Yeah from there, you pick up on stuff, which helped. It helped a lot.

Eric's comments are significant in that they support the assertion that being in the early college program provides students access to information channels that they may not have been privy too as traditional high school students. He acknowledges that his early college experiences afforded him an advantage over other freshman who did not have the opportunity to participate in and become acclimated to the college culture and norms associated with the financial aid process or getting books early.

Researchers (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Reid & Miller, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009) have also identified that a lack of social capital among minority and other under-represented students may also inhibit a student's ability to make informed decisions regarding the type of college they may want to attend and range of options that are available to them. College choice has been found to be significantly related to a student's likelihood of graduating from college (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Melguizo, 2008; Mortenson; 2007). Students who attend more selective universities have a higher probability of graduating from college (Melguizo). Roderick et al. pointed out that when students have a constrained college search, as a result of not understanding all of the options available to them, they are more likely to enroll in colleges that are less selective schools than what they are eligible to attend. The issue of college selection proved to be

one of serious concern for the students in this study. Five of the nine students who did enroll in college after high school regretted their initial choice of school and either transferred to another college or withdrew from college totally.

Damien shared that he regrets not having applied to more selective colleges. He discussed his process of selecting a college:

Damien: Well, I had no idea what school I wanted to go to until my senior year and I think I limited myself I didn't have people before me so I could see, so I could kind of judge where I should apply to. Umm I didn't think I was qualified to apply to Ivy League schools. I, ok my GPA is a little low, my SATs were low enough then. I thought about it and I was actually a competitive student and I could have applied to those schools and maybe I would have gotten in with some of my friends who applied to those schools, my SAT scores and grade point averages was higher than theirs.

White: When you said you thought about going to an Ivy League school or didn't think that your GPA and stuff was high enough who were you talking to. Who was helping you to make those decisions about what you needed in order to apply to go to college.

Damien: I actually wasn't talking to anybody about the requirements for or how I would rank up against other students applying for those same schools. Uh it wasn't until late into the year when I went to [a scholarship] convention and people were telling me what schools they were going to and we got to talking about SAT scores and GPAs and I was like Oh man I could have applied to that school, but by that time it was far too late. It was April/May . . . Yeah it was kind of difficult to talk to people about how I would rank up against going to those schools.

Eric also did not make a decision on where to go to school until late into his senior year:

White: What made you choose the college that you first attended?

Eric: Ummm, it's going to be the weirdest story. But uh, I was so indecisive about what school I was going to go to. So I just got tired of people asking me, where you going to school? When you going to pick a school? You gotta pick one before the summer comes and stuff. So finally after graduation I just put all the names in a hat and I randomly drew out a school and that was the choice I stuck with. And it happened to be [this

one]. So yeah that was how I came out picking what college I was going to.

White: What was your high school experience like in terms of somebody helping you to know about choosing a college and anything like that?

Eric: Umm, in high school, [one of my teachers] she always was like pick something that you think you will be comfortable with. Pick a school you will be comfortable at. And uh, make sure they have your major of course and um, if you are going to go in-state or out of state. Um, what else, do you want to go to a two-year or four year school? Just different things, and also my scholarship program, they use to help us like. I think they were the main ones that sort of swung my idea about staying in state. 'Cause I was really planning on going [out of state], and they were like naw, you can like stay in the state and you go to school here and you save this money you save this amount of money in your pocket and stuff, and you'll be good. You'll get the same education and stuff and you'll be closer to home. And uh, me being me, I thought that sounds good. And so, yeah that ah.

The other students had very similar stories. Two of the students who were still at their original school and had not transferred or withdrawn reported that they did not apply to and decide to go to their institutions until after graduation from high school. The decision about what school to apply to and to attend was often made at the last minute, without a lot of consideration given to best fit for the student.

Previously the facet of college knowledge and the contextual skills needed to access and persist in the postsecondary environment had not been given a lot of consideration in the realm of college readiness skills. However, more recent research by Conley and others has shown that this area of college planning plays a significant role in a student's success in college.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings from this study of early college high school students' perceptions of their early college experience and their preparedness for

the traditional college environment. Data from focus groups and qualitative interviews conducted with 13 students from an urban early college high school were used to describe how the students perceived their experience as dually enrolled students and as traditional college students. The findings were presented as they related to two key findings, (a) the early college as foundation for transition to college and (b) college readiness in the postsecondary environment. Each topic was discussed using the students' voices to illuminate the factors that developed and challenged them as high school and college students. Chapter 5 offers conclusions and implications of the study results as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> I envision a society where everyone has an equal opportunity at obtaining success. When underrepresented students arrive at The University they are often identified as different from the mass[es] and placed in a "box" with expectations as to what they will accomplish based on their demographic. As students arrive at UGA and later matriculate, they have a right to find out for themselves where they fit in. This vision is well. However, the thing that sets these students apart from the mass[es] of the university also hinders them. Because these students are underrepresented they often don't have established resources on campus or means to explore their passions for themselves. This is where the complacency from getting in where you fit in comes from. With my vision I see people genuinely taking an interest in the aspirations [of] others. A network of allies should be established in order to lend support and make otherwise unattainable necessities possible. I see a community, UGA, and world where we can lean on as well as learn from one another. (Chris Lambert, University of Georgia, Class of 2014)

Chris Lambert is not a student from my study. He is a young man whom I met at a conference where I had been asked to serve on a panel sharing my personal and professional experiences related to leadership. The "LeaderShape" Institute where Chris and I met engages college students over 6 days of intense dialogue and self-discovery to stir-up and increase their leadership capacity. The goal of the institute is to "challenge participants to *lead with integrity* while working towards a vision grounded in their deepest values. Participants explore not only "what they want to do, but who they want to be" (http://www.leadershape.org/Institute.aspx). The Institute's guiding principle and prevailing tagline is "to lead with integrity and a healthy disregard for the impossible." On day 2 of the Institute, participants are asked to write their vision of how they would make the world a better place, irrespective of the barriers that could hinder their visions. The statement above was Chris's. Chris is an African American, male, first-generation college attendee whose vision is to create a support system and network of resources for

other underrepresented students who desire to attend a postsecondary institution, but may not have access to the information or resources that will assist them in applying to and achieving in college.

Chris and I did not know each other prior to day 6 of his LeaderShape Institute; however, we have developed a relationship since then that has enriched my life and reinforced my hope and expectations for this next generation. Chris's vision statement was very important to me because it was confirmation for me that the research I was doing to complete my doctoral degree was significant and meaningful. Chris and I talked at length that evening about his experiences applying to college, deciding on what college to attend, and what his transition from high school to college entailed. He shared his challenges and his triumphs and recognized how fortunate and "blessed" he was to have had access to caring adults and family that helped him access the information he needed to get to college. My encounter with Chris came at a time when I was once again considering the option of not completing my research, but after my meeting with him, he became my renewed inspiration. There has been a typed sign on my bathroom mirror that reads "Finish the dissertation. Failure is not an option." It has been there for 3 years. In May of this year, the day after I met Chris, I handwrote on that sign, "Do it for Chris" and he and his vision have served as the impetus I needed to get to this final chapter in my dissertation.

Overview

The goal of this research was to examine the perceptions of college readiness and the high school experiences of students from an early college high school. Driven by a desire to understand better the facets of the early college experience that contribute to

college readiness and a belief that early college students themselves would provide the best account of their experiences, I sought to explore these issues using qualitative methods. This investigation revealed that students who attended Urban Early College High School had a high school experience that challenged them academically, socially, and emotionally. Additionally, they saw their high school experiences as ones that contributed to the development of the college readiness skills they would need to draw upon as they began their traditional postsecondary experiences. In this chapter, I review the key findings from the study relevant to the guiding research questions and discuss their significance in understanding the impact of early college on college readiness. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the study for early college policies and strategies, limitations of the research, and future research suggested by my findings.

Review of the Findings

The fourth core principle guiding the development and implementation of early college schools states, “Early college schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion” (Berger et al., 2010, p. 341). The early college students who participated in this study presented varying perspectives and experiences related to how their early college high school education met the expectations of this principle. The results of the analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following answers to the research questions that guided this study.

What are early college students' perceptions, as dual enrollment students, regarding their high school experiences?

The early college program operates in many ways like an apprenticeship program, providing students with relevant opportunities to test their academic and college readiness skills under the supervision of their high school teachers and other caring adults that can support their academic development and strengthen their confidence in their abilities to succeed as college students. The students in this study described their high school experience as one that prepared them for the rigor and expectations of the traditional college environment. They learned hard and valuable lessons as the first group of students to attend an early college high school in their state. Those lessons included learning to understand the difference between high school and college expectations, understanding the importance of talking with their college professors, managing their time wisely, and learning to discern when being a part of a peer group was a benefit or a deterrent. These were all key facets for building college readiness skills that would increase the likelihood that these students would have greater success in the traditional postsecondary environment.

How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success?

The students were asked the questions, "How prepared do you feel to continue your college education?" and "How has being an early college student influenced your future plans about college?" The prevailing sentiment among the respondents was that participation in the early college high school program resulted in increased confidence and commitment to progress into the traditional postsecondary environment.

In accordance with the core guiding principles of the early college initiative, students who attend an early college high school can expect a high school experience that will prepare them academically, socially, and emotionally for college-level work and learning (Howell, 2001). Nakkula and Foster (2007), in their study of academic identity development in early college students, substantiate the benefits that early college participation had on students' confidence and "knowing" versus "believing" that they could succeed in the postsecondary environment as traditional college students. The students who participated in my study corroborated this claim even though they spoke candidly about learning difficult lessons along the way.

Collectively all of the participants shared that participation in the early college program allowed them the opportunity to experience college and garner an understanding of the postsecondary culture that their peers in traditional high schools did not experience. Some early college schools are located directly on college campuses and others are not. The research (ARI/SRI, 2008) shows that early college high schools that are located on college campuses yield better student outcomes, such as higher attendance rates, better test scores, more academic engagement, self-confidence and higher postsecondary educational aspirations. Urban Early College High School was not located directly on campus; however, the students took all of their college courses on the campus and the students also had access to ancillary services, such as workshops, the student recreation center, and other student activities. Participants in the study concluded that their early college high school education contributed to their increased confidence to be successful in a postsecondary environment. Many of the students also concurred that, were it not for early access to college, they would not have aspired to go on to college after high school.

How do early college students perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

Guided by the college readiness framework proposed by the work of David Conley (2007), the participants who entered college following high school graduation provided an account of how prepared they were in the areas of (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) key academic content, (c) academic skills and behaviors, and (d) contextual skills and awareness–college knowledge. Conley defined college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed— without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 5). Research (Boatman & Long, 2011; Conley, 2005; Horn, McKoy, Campbell & Brock, 2009; Wiley et al., 2010) on the impact of remedial courses on educational outcomes reveals that freshmen who have to take a developmental or remedial course their first year in college have lower persistence rates and lower credit accumulation and they are less likely to graduate from high school (ACT, 2010; Wiley et al., 2010). Most of the students in this study did not have to take a remedial course upon enrollment in their freshman year of college.

The accounts the participants gave in regards to their preparedness in the area of college readiness skills indicate that their early college experience had the greatest impact in the areas of key cognitive strategies, academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness. Participants shared that the teachers at early college helped them to hone their critical thinking skills, which resulted in their increased confidence in the classroom in their colleges as well as enabling them to integrate and synthesize their learning across

disciplines and content. Additionally they felt adequately prepared in the area of academic behaviors, expressing that they learned valuable lessons about time management, conferring with their professors and using study groups as dual enrollment students. In the area of contextual knowledge and awareness, also referred to as college knowledge, the participants revealed how access to information about applying to college, completing financial aid applications and selecting the college they would attend was greatly influenced by the social networks they had developed as early college students.

The area in which the participants felt they were not as prepared as they should have been was in the area of academic knowledge. Consistently, the students discussed the challenges they faced in college courses, such as biology and mathematics, in which they had expected to excel based on the preparation and successful completion of those courses in high school. Current emphasis in the area of high school reform and access to postsecondary institutions focuses on the misalignment of academic content between the secondary and postsecondary environments. Historically, there has been a push for high school students to take a certain core curriculum to ensure that they would be prepared to engage in college-level work (ACT 2010). However, a more recent policy effort has emerged that recognizes that it is not the number of courses that students take in high school that increase success in college but it is the rigor of those courses that produces a greater likelihood of academic proficiency in the college classroom (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). The connection between the incongruence academically in high school and college is directly reflected in the high number of students that are

required to take remedial courses in college, thereby increasing the odds of students having less than optimal education outcomes.

The early college high school initiative is positioned to have a tremendous impact on the number of underrepresented students that can not only access the postsecondary environment, but also persist and graduate from college. The students in this study provided data that can assist educators, administrators and policy makers with evaluating and refining college readiness strategies to ensure greater academic success for early college students both as dual-enrollment students and traditional college students.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study resides in the sharing of the experiences of students who were the first in their state to participate in an educational reform, the Early College High School, an effort aimed at simultaneously reducing high school drop-out rates and increasing college access rates. Historically, students who excel academically have most benefited from the opportunity to attend college while in high school. Programs such as dual-enrollment, advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) programs have aided the academically mature students in accelerating their college careers (Abell; 2007); however, with the implementation of initiatives like the early college high school, underachieving and underrepresented students now also have the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. Research has shown that students who have participated in programs that offer early access to college have received benefits “such as greater access to a wider range of rigorous academic and technical courses, savings in time and money on a college degree, promoting efficiency of learning, and enhancing admission to and retention in college” (Kleiner, Lewis, & Greene, 2005 p. 1). Given that

the trend of allowing early college access to students not in the top tiers of their classes is a relatively new approach, this investigation contributes to garnering a greater understanding of how early college access is experienced by students. Privileging the student's perspective by presenting their experiences, using their voices, provides an opportunity to understand their educational needs and concerns and include them as meaningful partners in the process of reforming secondary education. In his essay on the reemerging field of student voice, Michael Fielding (2004) purported that encouraging young people to express their aspirations and concerns about matters related to their education offers an important contribution to education for a civic society. Too often the student voice is dismissed because students are only seen as receivers of education and not as active participants in the process of education (Friere, 1970).

Implications for Educational Policy

The transition from high school to college has been shown to be a critical step in the establishment of a foundation for educational attainment, career options, and social mobility for all students, but particularly for underrepresented students (Contreras, 2011). The early college initiative is positioned to not only facilitate a seamless transition that fuels the secondary to postsecondary pipeline, but it can also stand to decrease the number of students that are being funneled into the school to prison pipeline. While there is evidence that violence and crime is decreasing in U.S. public schools (Archer, 2009), there were still 3.1 million students suspended from school in 2000, a number that almost doubled from the 1.7 million students suspended in 1973 (Wald & Losen, 2003). The school to prison pipeline as defined by Archer (2009) "is the collection of education and public safety policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren out of the

classroom and into the streets, the juvenile justice system, or the criminal justice system" (p. 868). Disproportionately that pipeline is comprised of students who live in high poverty, attend minority schools and have access to the fewest resources; characteristics of many of the students to whom the early college initiative is targeted. This dissertation research fits into the scheme of educational policy in the context of investigating strategies and policies that engage and motivate students versus those that perpetuate actions that lead to negative outcomes.

Contribution to Educational Research

This research contributes to a growing body of literature on the early college school model and its effectiveness in contributing to better postsecondary educational outcomes for students, specifically students who are minority, English language-learners, and first-generation college attendees. The data from this study contribute to an examination, from the student's perspective, of how effective their early college high school experience was in regards to developing the requisite college readiness skills that students need to be successful and independent traditional postsecondary students. One of the initial goals of the ECHSI was to address deplorable high school graduation rates while also improving college access rates. The dichotomous nature of this goal necessitated a two-pronged examination of the students' high school experience, first investigating how well the model was implemented during the student's secondary-school tenure, and second gathering data on how successful the students faired as traditional college students.

In the 10 years since the Gates Foundation spearheaded the Early College High School Initiative, the number of schools operating under the model has increased from

three schools in the 2002-2003 school year to well over 200 schools in operation during the 2010-2011 school year (JFF, 2010). Yet despite this rapid growth in numbers of schools opening, the empirical evidence to substantiate the success of the model has been slow to surface in the literature. The most comprehensive evaluations of the program have been completed by American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International. Originally commissioned by the Gates Foundation to evaluate the ECHSI, AIR/SRI has produced six evaluation reports over the 10 years that the initiative has been in existence and only in the last report (2009) have data been included related to student outcomes and experience post early college high school.

The prevailing data available on the initiative have focused on implementation issues and high school graduation and attendance rates. In a recent publication produced by Jobs for the Future, Webb and Mayka (2011) provided a detailed account of the model in terms of how well the initiative is serving the target population of students, the number of college credits earned by early college students in high school, the graduation rates of early college high schools and the percent of early college students that enroll in college right out of high school. The data in these reports all reflect that the early college high schools are making great strides in reaching their goals to graduate more students from high school and for those students to transition into the postsecondary environment.

Over the course of time that my research was being conducted, the body of literature on the early college movement grew, especially in the area of implementation efforts of the schools and student outcomes related to attendance and performance on high stakes testing. The investigation that I designed allowed for new evidence to be contributed to the early college literature and to educational research. The research design

used the student voice to describe the early college experience and the students' perceived readiness for college success. While there is a substantial body on college readiness, there is very little from the perspective of students. This study contributes information in that area.

Limitations of the Study

The impetus for this study was to garner a better understanding of the early college high school experience and its impact on the college access and success rates of the students who attended the high school. The use of qualitative methods to collect data that would yield rich, "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of the participants and their perceptions of their high school experience emanated from my desire to privilege the students' voice and allow their stories to be told through this study. Although careful attention was given to the design and implementation of this investigation, there were restraints, some within my control and others that were not. Given that the data presented in this study are solely from the viewpoint of the students, one limitation to the study is the absence of the voice of the teachers, counselors, college faculty and administrators who were also apart of these students' early college experiences. While their perspectives could have added a different dimension to understanding the challenges and success of implementing the early college high school model, they could not speak to the students' experiences in the same way that the students could. Future studies could examine the teachers' perspective of the early college strategies and add new information to the literature.

While the early college model is targeted to students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the postsecondary environment, students of color, students who are

English-language learners, and first generation college attendees, there were no English-language learners included in the study. In this first class of students at the high school, there were no students who identified themselves as English-language learners, thereby limiting the potential participant pool to only students from the other two target populations. This also presents as a limitation to the study.

Another limitation was that the participants were from one early college high school, and while they were unique in that they were the first class of early college students in their state, their experiences may have been unique to their high school experience. The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize to the larger population, but rather to delve deeper into a phenomena and describe it. This research was an exploratory investigation aimed at identifying issues important to the students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study indicate a continued need for research in the areas of (a) development of seamless K-16 systems, (b) the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, (c) the association of the “power of place” with the development of social capital amongst early college students and (d) a review of college readiness measures. Most poignantly, the students’ perceptions and experiences illuminate the need for better coordination and alignment between the secondary and postsecondary environments. The elusive notion of a seamless K-16 system continues to be discussed across state and federal policy agendas; however, progress in this area continues to move slowly (Mason, 2009; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Mason makes the case that lack of alignment between the secondary and postsecondary environments directly affects the need for students to enroll in remedial courses in college. Remedial courses are costly both in the sense of

economic outlay (Saxon & Boylan, 2001) and the toll they take on a student's likelihood of graduating from college. Students of color and first-generation college students are disproportionately represented in the ranks of students who require developmental course work as entering freshmen in college (Wiley et al., 2010). Given that early colleges target these two populations of students, the impetus to work towards better alignment between the systems would seem paramount.

The participants in this study explicitly cited the need for the high school curriculum to better reflect the rigor and content of the postsecondary environment. One approach that may affect this area of need is the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted by 47 states and the District of Columbia (Achieve, 2011). The Common Core State Standards are

> a major advance in standards for mathematics and English language arts. They are grounded in evidence about what it takes for high school graduates to be ready for college and careers and build on the finest state and international standards. They also provide a clear and focused progression of learning from kindergarten to high school graduation that will give teachers, administrators, parents and students the information they need for student success. They were developed by and for states in a voluntary effort led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (Achieve, 2011, p. 10)

Continued research should be conducted with early college students to determine if there is marked improvement in the alignment of high school and college standards, especially because they as well as other students who participate in early college access programs are uniquely situated to simultaneously be enrolled in high school.

Early college high schools that are physically located on the campuses of the partner institution of higher education have exhibited the strongest student outcomes with respect to state assessment scores, attendance rates and progression from the 9th to 10th grades (Hooker & Brand, 2009). Many have attributed these gains to "the power of

place," the notion that when students take classes on campus, use college facilities and actively associate with other college students they can see themselves as college-goers that are capable of being successful in the postsecondary environment (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Lieberman 2004). This power of place can also be instrumental in the development of social networks that may influence a student's access to and success in college. An important aspect of college readiness is the acquisition of "college knowledge," which includes the information and skills high school students need to traverse the complex college admissions and financial aid processes, as well as their ability to develop an understand college norms and culture (Conley, 2007; Roderick et al., 2009). Social capital, which includes norms and information channels (Coleman, 1988) and is available through social relationships within a student's social network (Hinton-Farmer & Adams, 2006), can have a significant impact on how early college students acquire college knowledge. Findings from this study indicate that their early college experience gave them an advantage in the area of college knowledge that other freshmen students on their traditional college campuses did not have. For early college high schools whose students do not have the benefit of taking classes on the college campus, research should evaluate the ways in which students develop college knowledge skills.

Improving college readiness measures must continue to have prominence in the educational reform arena and Conley's work offers a promising agenda to moving this work forward. However, for Conley's work to be applicable in a broad spectrum of students, it must be examined more thoroughly within the cultural and historical context of diverse groups of students, particularly students who have traditionally been underrepresented in postsecondary education. The domains of Conley's framework

represent constructs that develop through complex interactions between students and teachers in educational settings that may or may not acknowledge the sociocultural aspects of race and culture that affect student learning. Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, and Gotanda (2002) have used cultural-historical activity theory to examine the language, culture and politics of current education reform efforts. Their study examined how social constructs such as race, ethnicity, language and ability contextualize and mediate schooling outcomes. This same type of evaluation of Conley's framework is warranted to broaden an understanding of the framework from the perspective of diverse student populations.

Another salient research approach would be to independently or collectively expand this study to include the perspectives of parents, teachers, counselors, school administrators and college faculty. All of these adults play an integral role in the implementation of the early college model and all can be change agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) that transmit social capital to students.

Contribution to Education Research Methodology

Since the 1980s, there has been increased support for the use of computer assisted software for the management of qualitative data. This study contributes to education research methodology by documenting the benefits of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software as a tool for facilitating the management and storage of large quantities of data. The use of Atlas.ti: the Knowledge Work Bench in this study proved to be a significant contributor to assisting me with managing my data when the color-coding, and cutting and pasting of physical pieces of paper became unwieldy and overwhelming. The use of the software enabled quicker and easier access to the transcripts from the

interviews and focus groups while also allowing me to attach my thoughts, reflections, observer comments and memos to the data. Additionally, through the use of networking and mapping functions within the program I was able to scaffold my codes into sub-themes and themes as my analysis transformed from interpretation to theory building. Banner and Albarran (2009) posit that the use of CAQDAS promotes rigorous data analysis by enabling researchers to modify analysis while tracking changes, to identify ongoing modifications, and to involve multiple researchers and multiple data sources like audiovisual and photographical data. While I did not use the software with the audio data collected from the interviews, I was able to continually examine my codes and themes and create multiple networks and webs exchanging codes and contributing to the development of my theory. Appendix F provides a visual of the networking capabilities of the software. This visualization of the data enabled me to become closer to the data, contrary to claims that CAQDAS distances the researcher from the data.

Conclusion

The early college high school model has shown great promise in addressing the issues of reducing high school drop-out rates and increasing the number of under-represented students that are transitioning from high school to the postsecondary environment. To achieve the goals that President Obama and his administration have set forth in the area of education, it will take innovative approaches like the early college initiative. Vital to the persistent success of the initiative is continued evaluation that involves parents, students, teachers, counselors and other stakeholders in the development of refined and renewed early college strategies that meet the changing needs and demographics of the students who attend the schools.

Personal Reflections on Completing this Degree: "Profiting from Trials"

> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (*James 1*: 2-4)

My contribution to the scholarship on educational research methodology lies in the trials and triumphs of completing my doctoral dissertation. My experiences with this project have crafted who I have become as a scholar, a researcher, and a human being. My experiences will forever affect how I approach the rest of my career in the area of educational research. These verses from the *Book of James* helped to keep me grounded and persevering, as I grew weary in the process of reading, writing, revising, and recovering from mistakes and hardships. My study and the process of completing it did not come without important lessons learned. It is my hope that as I share those lessons other new scholars and researchers will benefit from my process.

There is much that goes into the development of conducting a research project as a student. I choose to do a case study, and as both Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) advocate, an important step in conducting a case study is a realistic and thorough evaluation of the researcher's skills. Both scholars shared that the challenge of ambiguity inherent in the design and completion of a case study can deter and frustrate a researcher more inclined to the structure of "procedures and protocols that can be followed step by step" (Merriam, p. 20). Yin shared that the demands of a case study on the researcher's "intellect, ego and emotions are greater than any other research strategy" (p. 58), primarily because the procedures are not routinized. My academic strengths throughout my doctoral coursework were always in the quantitative courses that I took. I am naturally analytical, clearly more bent towards a positivist paradigm. Nonetheless, I

wanted to explore qualitative methods as I believed that the data derived from a naturalistic perspective would provide a deeper understanding of the early college experience. Even though I had read Yin's and Merriam's precautions, I was not adequately prepared to overcome the changes that came along with a research design that required an investigator who needed to be like a detective:

> The investigator's role in qualitative research can be compared to that of a detective. At first everything is important; everyone is suspect. It takes time and patience to search for clues, to follow up leads, to find the missing pieces, to put the puzzle together. For those who work best in a structured situation and have no patience with ambiguity, a more traditional research design is recommended. (Merriam, p. 21)

There is no magic formula that designates who will be a good case study investigator and who will not; however, Yin suggested that there are some common skills that each investigator must assess their aptitude in. Those skills include the ability to ask good questions, be a good listener, be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp on the issues being studied, and be unbiased by preconceived notions. Before undertaking my study, I did some reflection on these requisite skills and determined that I was adept at asking good questions. I always like to delve deeper than the surface of an issue. I am a good listener, my friends and colleagues were always coming to me to be a sounding board, and I have been told that I am easy to talk to and do not judge people. As I considered my ability to navigate motherhood, being a wife, a student and a full-time employee, I certainly saw myself as adaptive and flexible, able to adjust to unforeseen situations, capitalizing on change as an opportunity and not a threat. I was less assured of my firm grasp of the issue being studied, but I thought that was normal given that the purpose of my study was to learn more about my topic. Finally, because I was so intricately involved in the school I was studying I was aware that I had to guard against

preconceived notions and be aware of any bias that I might bring into my work. All things considered, I believed I had taken an inventory of my skills and determined that I should be able to successfully design and complete my study. Then life happened.

Life suddenly and abruptly was not cooperating with my plans to collect analyze and interpret data for my study. A new job 1,000 miles from my family and my study participants led to unforeseen stressors both personally and professionally that were not mentioned in the writings of case studies experts like Yin and Merriam. Stressors that resulted in my inability to focus on my writing or anything related to my study. It did not take very long before the notion of being ABD (all but the dissertation) became a viable option for me. After all, what did I really need the degree for? I had the knowledge nobody could take that away from me. Plenty of people survive and thrive being ABD. As appealing as quitting was to me, there was my family looking at me, saying you can't quit, you never let us quit so how can you? So I got it together, intellectually and emotionally and patiently began to pull the pieces together. I was fortunate to have a major advisor who understood my challenges but did not allow me to use them as an excuse. She demanded my best, and, while empathetic to my situation, required that I give my best to the project.

My contribution to the field of educational research methodology is in sharing the lesson that patience is important. New researchers must be patient with the process. They must be patient with themselves. I wanted the process over, I wanted to move on with my life, I had not expected that completing the study would be so hard, take so much discipline and perseverance, but I am here today writing the final chapter, proud of what I accomplished. I learned from my mistakes and determined that in spite of the challenges,

my study is complete and I am poised to continue contributing to the field of educational research. I am only here because I was patient, and others were patient with me.

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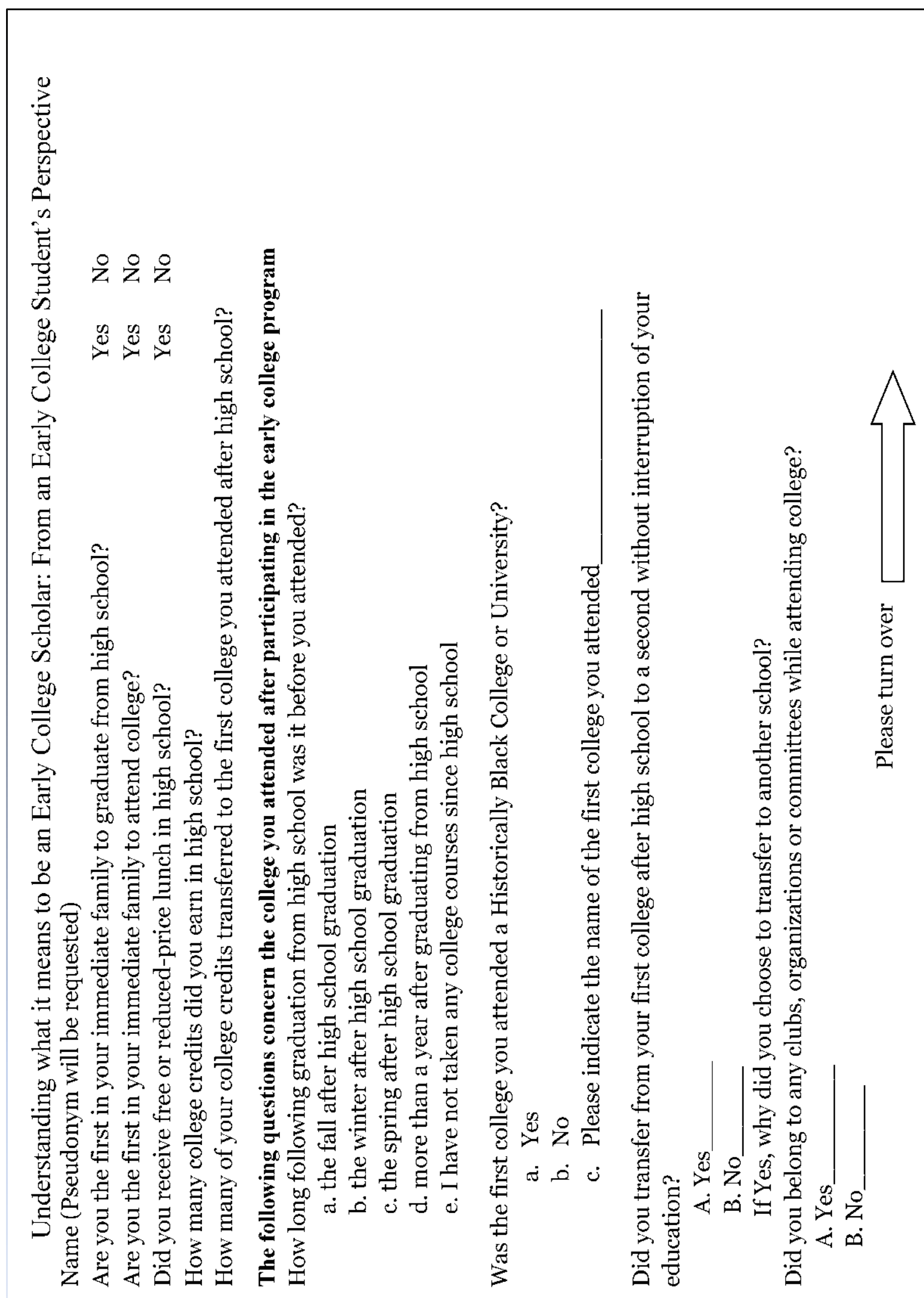
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE



Understanding what it means to be an Early College Scholar: From an Early College Student's Perspective

Name (Pseudonym will be requested)

Are you the first in your immediate family to graduate from high school? Yes No

Are you the first in your immediate family to attend college? Yes No

Did you receive free or reduced-price lunch in high school? Yes No

How many college credits did you earn in high school?

How many of your college credits transferred to the first college you attended after high school?

The following questions concern the college you attended after participating in the early college program

How long following graduation from high school was it before you attended?

a. the fall after high school graduation
b. the winter after high school graduation
c. the spring after high school graduation
d. more than a year after graduating from high school
e. I have not taken any college courses since high school

Was the first college you attended a Historically Black College or University?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Please indicate the name of the first college you attended____________________

Did you transfer from your first college after high school to a second without interruption of your education?

A. Yes_______
B. No_______

If Yes, why did you choose to transfer to another school?

Did you belong to any clubs, organizations or committees while attending college?

A. Yes_________
B. No________

Please turn over

Describe a difficult situation that occurred during your college experience after high school, which you were able to work through because of something you learned during your early college experience.

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction: I am here to talk with you today about the types of support you may or may not have or have had during the last four years of being in the early college program. It is important to me to understand how you describe support. As adults we believe we know a good deal about how best to help young people maneuver their way through a program like early college, but if we never take the time to ask you if we were right or not, we will never know what we could do better. So for the next hour I would like to hear from each one of you how you describe support from your teachers, your friends, your family and perhaps some other group that I may not know.

1. Tell me what it means to you to be an early college student.

2. If I say the word support, what comes to your mind? Define it for me.

3. Describe for me the types of support you had or did not have available to you as an early college student.

4. If you could have been on the planning committee for early college, what would you have made sure was in place to help early college students be successful each year of high school?

5. If you were asked to talk to a group of parents and teachers, how would you advise them regarding the support of their early college student?

6. Describe your experience being a high school student and college student at the same time? (Follow-up question)Did you receive the necessary support to manage those two roles at the same time?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL No. 1

Individual Interview Protocol

Project: Exploring the relationship of social support, student achievement and college readiness in an early college high school.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

The purpose of this interview is to get an understanding, from your point of view, of what it means to have support as an early college high school student. There are no right or wrong answers, just share your thoughts with me about the questions I ask you. If I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer you do not have to, just say can we skip to another question. Ok, let's get started.

1. Describe your experience as a high school student taking college courses.

2. Who or what are your supports?

3. Can you tell me what it was like having other students from your high school in your college classes with you? (probe: was it helpful or supportive for you)

4. If you could have been on the planning committee for early college what do you think you would have suggested making the program successful?

5. Discuss how the past two years as an early college/Georgia state student has influenced your future plans about college.

6. Describe the level of support you received during your first year of taking courses at [University].

7. How prepared do you think you are now to continue with your college education?

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Follow-Up Individual Interview Protocol

Project: Understanding college readiness from the perspective of early college students.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewee:

Background Questions

1. What is your current classification at your college?
2. How many of your dual-enrollment credits transferred to your college?
3. Have you declared a major?
4. What is your overall GPA
5. Did you have to take any remedial courses when you enrolled in college?

Academic Preparedness

1. How prepared academically do you think you were to continue with your college education after high school?
2. How well do you think you were prepared for your college level math class(es)
3. How well do you think you were prepared for your college english classes
4. How well do you think you were prepared for your college science class(es)
5. How well do you think you were prepared for your social science courses (psychology, sociology, etc) in college?
6. Compared to other students in your college courses did you feel more or less prepared than them?

Academic Behaviors

1. Describe your study habits? (Probe: How are they different from how you studied in high school)
2. How did your early college experience impact your study habits?
3. How did your early college experience impact your time management skills?

Key Cognitive Factors

1. Can you describe how confident you are in your ability to think critically?
2. How did your early college experience affect your ability to use critical thinking skills?
3. Can you share your thoughts about participating in college level research?

Contextual Skills/Awareness

1. How would you describe your transition from a dual enrollment college student to a traditional college student?
2. Who were some of the people who helped you learn the college culture?
3. How did you make the decision about what college you wanted to attend?
4. How did your early college experience prepare you for applying for financial aid?
5. How did your early college experience prepare you for interacting with college professors?

Final Thoughts

1. If you had to give advice to new early college students what would you tell them?
2. How could the early college experience have better prepared you for college?

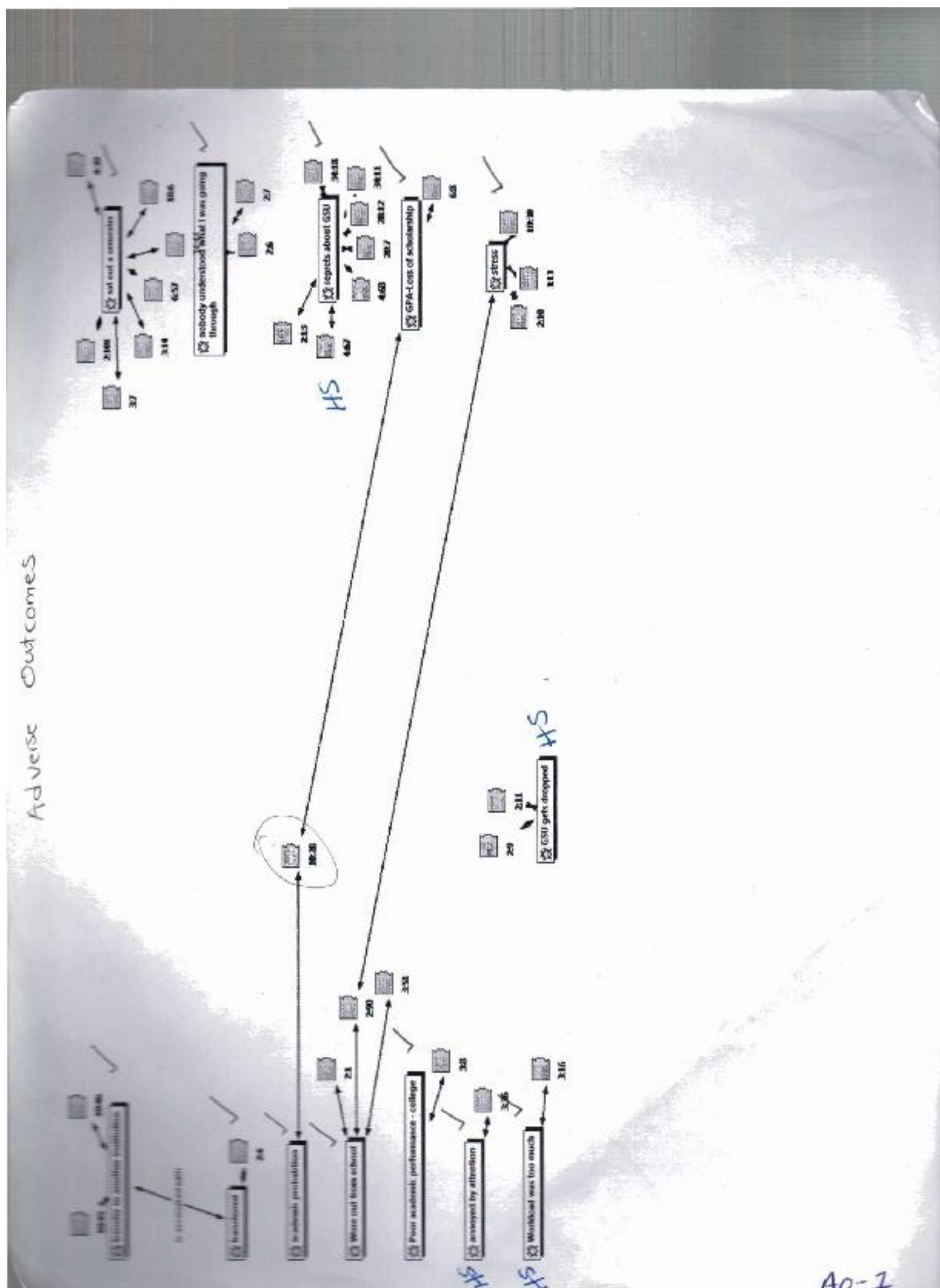
APPENDIX E

LIST OF INTERMEDIARIES

- Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
- Center for Native Education
- City University of New York
- Communities Foundation of Texas
- Foundation for California Community Colleges
- Gateway to College National Network
- KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- Middle College National Consortium
- National Council of La Raza
- North Carolina New Schools Project
- SECME, Inc.
- Utah Partnership Foundation
- Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

APPENDIX F

ATLAS Ti: DATA TO CODES



Code Family: Adverse Outcomes

HU: 07.20.11Dissertation Analysis
File: [C:\Users\Owner\Documents\Scientific Software\ATLASti\TextBank\07.20.11Dissertation Analysis.hpr6]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 2011-07-22 11:42:27

Created: 2011-07-22 11:36:37 (Super)
Codes (14): [academic probabtion] [annoyed by attention] [GPA-Loss of scholarship] [GSU gets dropped] [nobody understood what I was going through] [Poor academic performance - college] [prepared for college (-)] [regrets about GSU] [sat out a semester] [stress] [transfer to another institution] [transferred] [Wore out from school] [Workload was too much]
Quotation(s): 33

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:1 [Wore out from school] (4:4) (Super)
Codes: [Wore out from school - Family: Adverse Outcomes]
No memos

Wore out from school

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:4 [transferred] (10:10) (Super)
Codes: [transferred - Family: Adverse Outcomes]
No memos

transferred

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:6 [didn't have anybody to underst..] (14:14) (Super)
Codes: [nobody understood what I was going through - Families (2): Adverse Outcomes, Student Characteristics]
No memos

didn't have anybody to understand where I was coming from

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:7 [my mom n them cant really rela..] (14:14) (Super)
Codes: [nobody understood what I was going through - Families (2): Adverse Outcomes, Student Characteristics]
No memos

my mom n them cant really relate to the stress level and the workload that we get just in college by itself

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:9 [cut one out that was the GSU p..] (18:18) (Super)
Codes: [gets dropped - Family: Adverse Outcomes]
No memos

cut one out that was the GSU program

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:10 [additional stress because you ..] (20:20) (Super)
Codes: [stress - Family: Adverse Outcomes]
No memos

additional stress because you had that and you had the college work

P 2: Interview #1 05.16.11-Final - 2:11 [I wasn't really feeling it lik..] (22:22) (Super)
Codes: [gets dropped - Family: Adverse Outcomes]

AO-2

APPENDIX G

CODE TO NETWORK VIEW